

GROWING TOGETHER

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND YOUTH



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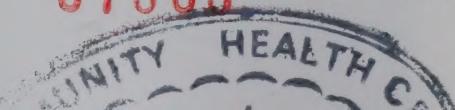
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Dedication

**Dedicated to the memory of
RUTH KIOKO,
and to her children
STELLA, VICTOR and MUENI**

Through her testimony, Ruth, who died of AIDS in 1993, continues to speak to countless people worldwide through the “Springs of Life” video.

To young people, Ruth admonishes
*“I would just tell you to wait [to have sex]
until the day of your marriage;
otherwise, AIDS is waiting for you.”*

To her children, Ruth wrote:
*“You see, I love you dearly, but I am being consumed by AIDS.
I’m going. I must go.
I’m sure that God will take care of you.
With love, Mom.”*

WITH THANKSGIVING FOR RUTH’S TESTIMONY!

Note: Pictures and names used in story are fictitious, except “Esther’s Story.”

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

So someone in your family is changing! Their voice may be squeaky, their moods unpredictable, and their energy tireless. Your son or daughter is becoming a man or woman. You would like to help them become a man or woman of God, ready for a world that will continue to change around them. But their world is different from yours when you began to face your teen years. How do you begin? This book will help you.

This book is addressed to you, as parents or as a single parent, because of two findings. The most important finding is from God's Word, the Bible. The responsibility for helping our children develop into men and women of God is primarily the parent's responsibility. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up...Do what is right and good so that it may go well with you."* (Deuteronomy 6:5-7,18) God's commands or truths apply to all of life, and God has given you the challenge and joy of instructing your children in their spiritual, emotional, and physical development while they are in your home. It must begin when children are born and continue through their pre-teen and teen years.

Each developmental stage must be addressed in ways children can understand. In pre-teen years it is critical that parents are open and honest with youth about emotional and physical development. This book guides both you, as a parent, and your pre-teen or teenage child in that process.

The second finding comes from young people. A survey conducted among Kenya's youth who regularly attend church revealed surprising information. Youth want to learn from their parents what it means to become an adult and what sex is all about. When asked what information

source they preferred for learning about sexuality, they replied, "Parents!" They trust you to tell them accurate, value-based information. Your teenage child values your guidance and information more than any other source, including their friends, school, or the media.

So you have two excellent reasons to use this book with your children. God has given you the privilege and responsibility to guide your children throughout their lives, including the teen years leading to adulthood. The problem is, most parents today are not equipped to do so.

You may face some barriers as you seek to fulfill these duties. The first is cultural. Culturally, you are not used to doing this. After all, you learned about growing up from an extended family member: an uncle, an aunt or a grandparent. Such specific information about physical changes in your body, attraction to the opposite sex, relating to elders, the roles of husbands and wives, and biblical or cultural guidance surrounding the act of sex came from grandparents, uncles, aunts, or a group of elders or women from the clan. Seldom are such things spoken directly between parent and child.

Times have changed. Your teenage child continues to face rapid changes in education, travel, boarding schools, exposure to city life, and the influences of outside cultures through radio, video, and television. The extended family may not even be accessible to your child because of all these reasons. In times of change, we find the need to cling to God's unchanging truth, rather than ignore the issues and needs of our children. It is still our duty to model godly marriages before our children and instruct them on how to become men and women of God. In addition, research tells us your child desires this from you more than anyone else!

A second barrier may be that you do not know where to begin. Talking about these facts of life directly to our children or youth is difficult because we are not used to doing it. What words should we use? When should we do it? What is the right place? What is my child really experiencing anyway? It is hard to talk to them.

This guide is structured to ease discussions rather than impose awkward moments as you begin. We recommend you use this guide with your child. Read it together or separately but be sure to discuss it together. Begin with prayer. Ask God to help you understand your own role, your own feelings and concerns, and prepare you to be open and helpful to your child. Begin early, before your son or daughter has fully changed physically and emotionally. A guideline would be to help your teenage child understand the changes they are about to face, when they are 11, 12, or 13 years of age. Do not wait until your son or daughter asks you, or you will never begin.

While this guide is intended to be used within the family, it is flexible enough to be used in youth groups or schools. The primary concern is to be sure our youth have value-based Christian guidance as they enter adolescence.

This guide has five basic sections.

The stories of Rose and Steven

Rose and Steven are typical young people facing the normal adolescent questions, experiences, changes, and problems. A number of issues that your teenager faces emerge in both stories. The issues are highlighted later in a section for youth and has questions for you to discuss together. Read the stories together with your son or daughter. Be casual and open. That will help your child respond more freely and honestly. Use these stories during a particular time, incorporating them into your family devotions, or use them during a specific time period, like a holiday when you are free from your normal responsibilities.

A closer look for youth

This section is for your teenager. It asks the questions young people are asking and provides answers in their language and context. It picks up the

issues illustrated in the story and explores them from a Christian perspective. Discuss the questions together with your child.

Issues examined include: understanding parents; physical changes; relating to authority; relating to the opposite sex; choosing friends; and being accepted by others.

A closer look for parents

This is especially for you, the parent of a teenager. It will help answer some of your questions about how to respond to your teenager and how to meet the biblical responsibility to guide your youth *“when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”* (Deuteronomy 6:7)

A true story is presented of a Kenyan family which modeled effective relationships, and the impact those relationships had even across generations. Relationships between parents and children require hard work and building strong foundations. These foundations: include taking time with youth; developing listening skills; being loving; and developing the gifts of youth.

Friendships

One of the most important challenges facing young people is that of developing friends. Our friends are mirrors of ourselves. We have different reasons for developing friendships. Friendships have both costs and rewards. One of the costs may be the price one has to pay in order to become part of a group.

This section helps young people understand friendships and the importance of making good choices in friendships and points the way to the best friendship that anyone can have.

Confronting common concerns

There are many common issues and problems young people face, which present them with significant challenges. These include sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS) and problems, such as sexual abuse, pregnancy, drug abuse and depression. This section provides information to better understand and confront these issues.

The challenge is yours - the challenge to have a role of life-long significance in your teenage child's life.

ROSE'S STORY

Rose is fourteen years old and lives with her parents up country. Her father is a teacher at a nearby primary school, and her mother works as a secretary in a cotton lint factory in their small home town. Rose has just completed her Class Eight exams. She hopes to pass well and get a place in a good secondary school. She has an older brother in Form Two and two younger sisters in Class Three and Five.



Since Rose was young, her family has taken care of her cousin, Anne, who is just a year younger than her and a class behind her. Rose and Anne are very close friends. They have grown up together, share the same room at home, do house chores together, and enjoy youth camps together. Many people often think they are sisters.

One Saturday afternoon, during the School holidays, Rose's mom sent Rose and Anne to town to buy sugar, tea leaves and cooking fat

“What are you going to wear?” Anne asked.

“Well, probably my black skirt and red blouse,” Rose answered. “I have to look nice in case we meet Ben on our way to the shops.”

“Have you seen him since the last youth camp in March? He really seemed to like looking at you while we were in the class. He is a nice boy,” her cousin added.

Rose picked at the pimples on her face. They had become more evident in the last few months.

“Oh, I wish these would go away. I look so bad with these all over my face. No boy is going to want to look at me. I have tried the new face cream but it doesn’t seem to be helping,” Rose complained.

“Remember what Auntie said? Sometimes when girls get to be our age they begin to change. Our breasts may begin to show, we begin our monthly periods, and pimples appear on our faces. She told us that there was nothing wrong and that it was only a sign that we were becoming big girls,” her cousin reminded her.

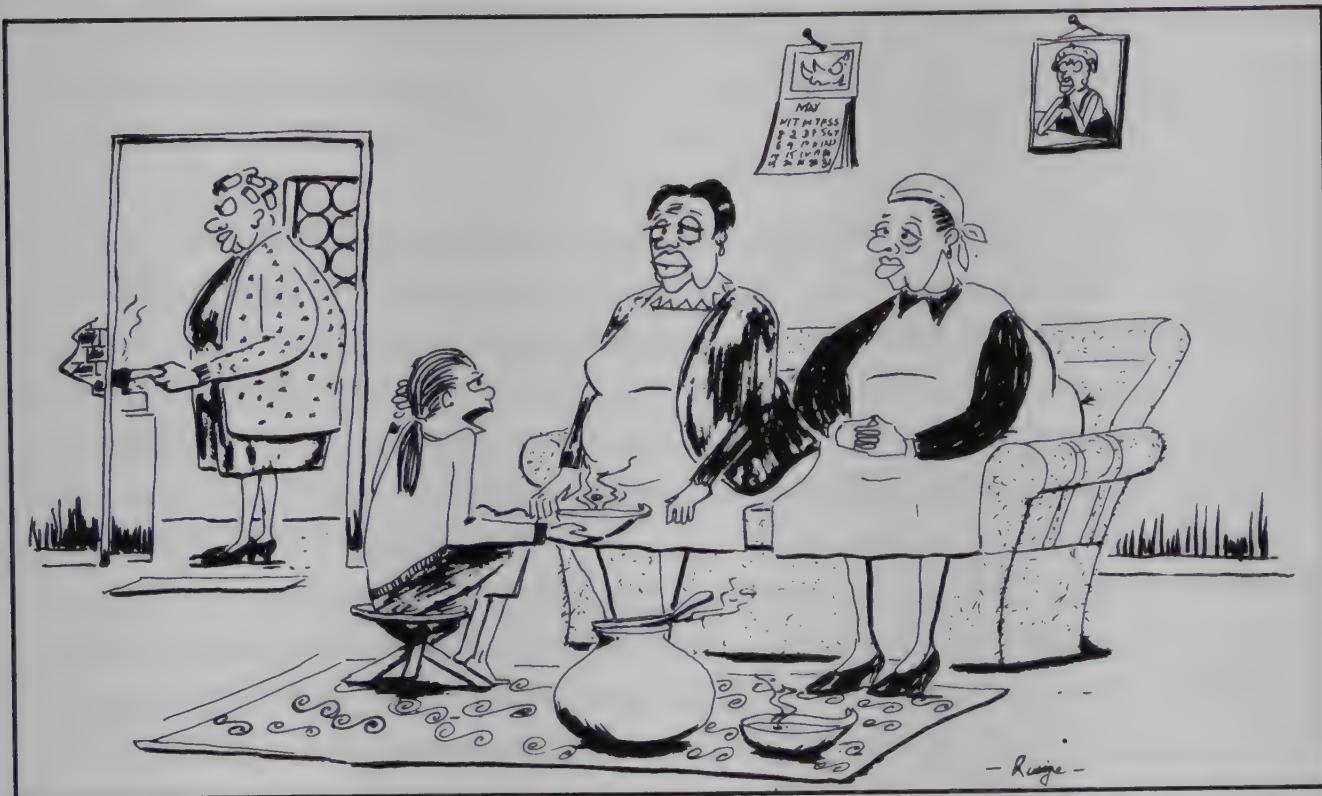
“I know, but I don’t want boys to see me this way especially now that I will be going to secondary school,” Rose explained.

At that time their mom called from outside to remind them to hurry up because it was getting late and the shops would close. They took their *kiondo* (basket), got the money, and were off. They did not meet anyone they considered special. They passed a few people who greeted them as they went. They knew their parents would wonder what they were doing so they did not delay. After buying what they needed they were on their way home again. Upon their arrival at home, they found Rose’s mom sitting outside talking to Aunt Emmah and Aunt Margaret. They shyly greeted them and went on to the kitchen to start cooking the evening meal.

“I wonder what they have come to do?” Anne asked.

“Oh, they are probably returning from the funeral of the relative who died last week, and they’ve decided to stop by on their way home,” Rose responded. “I don’t always feel comfortable when they are here because they ask questions about me or say things that are embarrassing in front of my parents or uncles.”

Rose’s parents had invited her aunts to come and speak with her about what to expect and how to behave in secondary school. Before long her mother called her from the kitchen and asked her to bring a chair and join



them outside. She really wondered what they wanted to tell her. She left her cousin in the kitchen, picked up a chair and sat by one of her aunts. She could tell by their faces that this was going to be a serious talk. Whatever the case, Rose was glad that her father was not yet home.

Her mother began the conversation, but Rose saw that she was uneasy.

"You know, Rose, you are just preparing to leave home for secondary school," she said. "We asked your aunts to come by and talk to you about how you should behave and some of the things which you will have to face as a young girl in boarding school."

Rose felt awkward, but she tried to hide it. Here she was with her mother and two aunts, and all she could do was listen.

"Rose, secondary school is going to be very different from primary school," her Aunt Margaret began. "You are going to be away from home, and you will not have your mother to tell you what to do or what not to do. You will be on your own. You have to be very careful what kind of friends you are around, especially boys. They can easily cheat you and before you know it, you become pregnant and are sent home from school."

Rose had never received advice like this before, and she wondered why they had to tell her now that she had become a big girl. But she could only listen in silence.

“Just as your Aunt Margaret has said, you have to be careful and remember why you are there. Your parents and all of us want you to study hard and pass well. Be like Mama Michael's daughter. You know, she just completed Form IV, and her mother told me that she did very well and got a very good report from her teachers. She can now probably get into a university which will help her get a good job.”

Rose longed to say what was on her mind, but she was not given a chance. Besides, she knew that if she did talk, it would be perceived as talking back to her aunts or being disrespectful. So she kept listening. Her Aunt Margaret, the more vocal one, interrupted her thoughts.

“There are many things we could tell you but it's getting late, and we have to go home. But don't forget what can happen in schools. Men are especially dangerous. Don't embarrass us, and don't forget, your parents have always wanted you to become a nurse, so study hard.”

That ended their discussion. Rose's mother asked her to go back to the kitchen and help serve the food so her aunts could eat before they left. After dinner, her mother and one of her younger brothers escorted the aunts home.

Rose was anxious about her exam results. She knew her father would be angry if she did not do well enough to get into a good school. The results came a week later. Rose had done very well. In fact, she did well enough to get into a private school, but her parents could not afford the fees so she joined a government school near an urban area. Rose spent time preparing to go with a heavy heart because she would be leaving her cousin behind. This was the one person with whom she could talk freely and enjoy spending time. Rose's father took her to report at the new school.

The school turned out to be very good, and Rose was excited to see things she had never seen. She got new uniforms and school shoes. The idea of having sheets and blankets, soap, lotion, and other essential supplies which she could call her own and be responsible for, was exciting. Her father gave her enough pocket money to last through the term. Her dormitory room, with seven other girls, was crowded, but bearable. She had more freedom here than at home, and she could make her own decisions.

There was one particular room mate, Sarah, with whom she seemed to get on well. They shared one bunk bed. Rose occupied the top bunk, and Sarah the bottom. They were in the same classes and often ate meals together. They would separate after school because they were involved in different activities. Rose was interested in drama, and Sarah had joined the music club. Supper was always a good discussion time for them. They would talk about what had happened that day. On one particular day, Rose had a lot to share.



“Sarah, there’s a guy in our drama club whom I really feel attracted to although I don’t know why. I asked one of the other girls in the club, and they said his name is Mike and that he is in Form III. I think he seems to be a nice guy and keeps looking at me during drama practice and when

we pass each other. Maybe he's just looking at the pimples on my face. I don't know."

"I don't think so," Sarah said quickly. "I don't think he would just be looking at you for no reason. If I were you, I wouldn't waste time. I would express that same interest back. You're lucky someone in Form III is interested in you. They are usually more experienced with girls."

"What do you mean?" Rose asked. "My aunts warned me about boys and how I should behave. They told me to be careful not to embarrass them by getting pregnant and being sent back home. You know how parents and relatives are. They always think we don't know these things."

Sarah stared at Rose with wide eyes. She could not believe what Rose was saying.

"You mean your aunts told you how to behave around guys in school? How would they know? I would never let my aunts tell me stuff like that. We never discuss those kinds of issues in our home. Most of what I know about relationships I learned from my friends."

"Well, you know," Rose started, "I can't really say we discussed anything in detail. They just told me to be careful."

Rose and Mike would meet around the school at different times of the day, but especially during drama. Drama was a lot more interesting with him there. He had now started talking to her and seemed very attracted to her. He was beginning to develop ideas about their relationship and was especially excited about the drama festival coming up in the city. After one of the drama meetings, he came up to Rose and asked whether she would sit with him on the way to the festival. She nodded shyly and shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "It's all right."

On the eve of the drama festival, the school's drama troupe travelled to the city. Rose and Mike sat next to each other on the bus.

"I'm looking forward to being with you in the big city," Mike said. "Maybe we can get a few moments to ourselves to wander off together and see

the city. After all, nobody will ever see us because there will be so many people."

Rose could not believe that Mike was only focusing on being with her. "*What about the festival?*" she wondered. "*That's really why we're going, not to see the city.*"

It was not long before they arrived at the centre where the festival would be held. They unloaded all their costumes and equipment and then proceeded to the school where they would be housed for the duration of the festival. Being in the city gave the students a sense of freedom because the teacher would find it difficult to keep an eye on them, especially when they were not performing. Mike was filled with a feeling of adventure and excitement. Rose wanted to have a good time, but she knew she would have to be cautious.

The festival opened with colour, excitement and fun. Mike and Rose's school performed after lunch. Although they were quite nervous, their performance went very well, and their 30-minute drama received a good round of applause. After the performance, their drama teacher got them together, congratulated them on a job well done, and reminded them to behave well while at the festival. They were expected to stay around and watch the rest of the schools perform. Mike did not like the idea. He had plans for himself and Rose and this was their only opportunity. As the teacher outlined the expectations, Mike winked at Rose, as if to communicate, "Let's meet after this!"

Rose knew Mike's intentions but she did not want to seem fearful or offended. After putting their costumes away, they walked out of the centre together.

"What are you planning to do right now?" Mike asked Rose. Rose looked uneasy.

"I'm planning to stay and watch the rest of the performances until the end," Rose responded quickly. Mike could not believe that she wanted to watch all the performances.

“You’re really going to stay until the end?” Mike added, “Why don’t you come with me for a walk and then we can come back and watch the last three performances?”

The idea sounded tempting to Rose, but she did not know whether to take up the offer. She wondered what people would think if they saw them together. She kept wishing that Mike would understand that may be this was not the right time for walks or visiting the city. But that thought did not stay for long.

Before Rose knew it, she had accepted Mike’s offer. Mike led the way. It was almost like he knew the city. They walked towards the school where they were staying but turned off onto a deserted road. They were the only two people around, and they could hear the sounds of excitement wafting from the festival in the distance. Mike started expressing his love to Rose.

“I really think you’re beautiful, Rose! I’ve always longed to hold you in my arms.” He then placed his arm around her waist as he led her toward a bushy area. Mike began to kiss her.

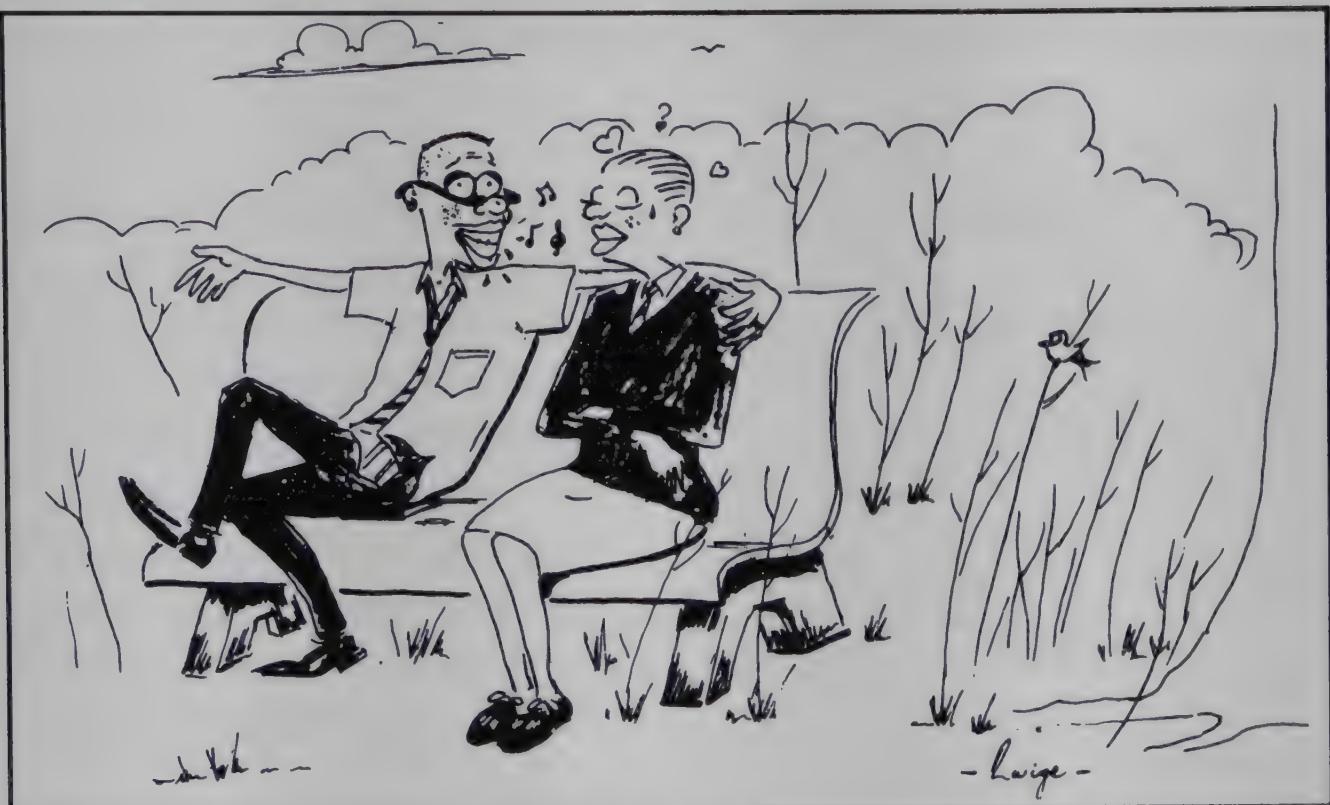
“Rose, I love you!” he said. “Let’s have some fun. Once we get back to school we won’t be able to spend time like this together.”

He grabbed the back of her skirt as if to start unbuttoning it.

“No, Mike,” she said, as she pulled his hand away. “I do not want to have sex. I can’t do it!”

He looked at her as if he doubted her words. “Come on, Rose. Don’t you love me? Why don’t you want to have fun?” He insisted. “It’s just this once, and it’s not wrong to show our love for each other.”

Rose could not believe she was in this situation. Fear gripped her. What if someone was watching them? She looked around to see if anyone had seen them go behind the trees.



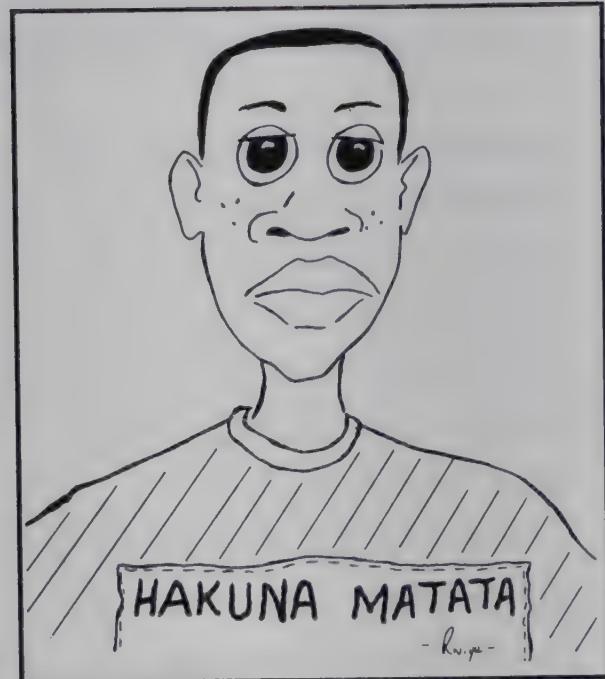
“No, Mike,” she repeated, as if Mike had not heard her the first time. “I can’t do it. I may even end up pregnant and be expelled from school. Or someone might just find out and we could be in trouble. I don’t want to embarrass my family. They would never forgive me.”

Rose looked at Mike. He seemed hurt and disappointed, but she had to say no. Like most girls, she would end up suffering the consequences, but he would get away with it. She could not tell him that, but that is how she felt. Her aunts’ cautions echoed in her mind. No! She would not embarrass her family!

Rose started walking back to the festival grounds. There was a bit of tension and very little conversation between them. Mike tried to start a conversation a few times without success. Rose was silently glad. She would never want her aunts to find out that she had been alone with a man, but she knew that if they did, they would be proud that she had turned down his advances. She looked forward to getting back to school to tell Sarah about her adventure.

STEVEN'S STORY

Steven is fourteen years old. He lives in a village in the country side with his family. He is the eldest child, and has two brothers and two sisters. His father manages his own farm and tries to sell his produce at the local market. His mother is a teacher at a primary school several kilometres away. Here is Steven's story in his own words.



Growing up is quite an adventure; that's what I've realised. There are the physical changes that one goes through, and the rituals that one has to start getting involved in. For me, this adventure started with initiation. I was initiated when I was ten years old--quite early, but that was the best time. Our family celebrated the occasion by throwing a party in my honour.

“You are a man now, Steve,” my father said to me as he carried me shoulder high. “You are no longer a boy. Don’t let anyone play around with you. And when your Dad is away, you are in charge of the family, okay?”

A feeling of pride filled my chest. I looked down at my younger brothers and sisters who were giggling and laughing excitedly and smiled at them the way adults smile, you know, with a twitch of the lips, and a squint of the eyes. Being initiated meant that I was old enough to do things on my own. I wouldn’t have to ask my parents permission to do things or to go out.

At least that's what I expected. I was sure they would expect me to make my own decisions. I could stay out longer than my brothers and sisters; I could stay up late after dinner, and I wouldn't have to do the kitchen work. And very soon, I would build my own hut, an initiate's hut.

Shortly after my initiation, I started noticing strange things happening to my body. I would be talking, and suddenly, my voice would break, sounding like a radio being tuned. This would happen at the most unlikely times and places; like in class, as I would answer a question. The girls would laugh at me. Then pimples attacked my face,



messing it up, and making me look horrid. I couldn't help wondering whether I was sick with rashes. One evening as I bathed, I noticed hair growing under my arms. But what I could not understand was why my parents were not asking me about some of these 'sicknesses'. Didn't they notice them?

I joined a boarding school for my secondary education. It was here that I came across a magazine that had some funny stories. You know, those stories that you wouldn't want your parents to see you reading. This magazine had a question section where readers could find answers to their problems. It was from this column that I learned that what I was going through was normal. I was only maturing into an adult.

"Why wouldn't my parents tell me these things?" I thought.

On vacation from school one day, I bumped into Sarah, one of my primary school classmates. Every time I met her, on the way to the shops, or as she carried water from the river, my heart would start beating faster. A warm feeling would flow over me, and I would not know what to do. I felt like I wanted to hold her in my arms and tell her I loved her. It was no different this time. In fact, the feelings seemed to be stronger than ever, because I hadn't seen her for a long time, and she had changed.

Something lurched inside me, and I gasped. Our eyes met for a moment and both of us dropped our gaze, although we noticed that we had started smiling. I could not sleep that night and for several nights after that. I told my friend Ken about it.

"Why don't you tell her what you are feeling?" Ken asked me.

"I don't know," I replied. "She is never alone when I want to talk to her."

"You need your own hut where you could take her without anyone knowing. Since you were initiated, haven't you built one?"

"Is it necessary?" I asked him.

"Come on, man," Ken retorted. "If it wasn't necessary would our customs require that every initiate build one? There are reasons for everything our culture demands that we do. One of those reasons is that a 'man' have a place of privacy, where he can entertain his friends without disturbing, or being disturbed, by his parents."

"My parents would not like it," I said. "Being alone with a girl in a room."

"You are a man," Ken retorted. "Behave like one. You've got to do what a man's got to do."

"You don't even have a girlfriend," I said. "How do you know all this?"

"Just because you don't have a girl doesn't mean everyone is like you,"

Ken said. "Anyway, you haven't been around to know what progress I've made."

"Why do you think we are so attracted to girls nowadays, but when we were in primary school we never wanted to be seen talking to them?" I asked, without looking at Ken.

He looked at me as if I were some strange creature. "Man, that is growing up. That is being an adult. Stop asking childish questions. This is a different time and you have to behave differently. I don't care why it happens. I just know it is exciting to be with a girl."

I was able to get Sarah to be my girlfriend. She was beautiful! Sarah's brown eyes seemed to pierce into me as she looked at me. They just drew me into her. Her voice would make my ears tingle and pull at my heart. Oooh, what a feeling! In the beginning we had to sneak around to avoid being detected by the grown-ups. To avoid suspicion, Sarah and I would get two or three of our friends, and we would meet by the roadside and walk along talking. But Sarah and I would be a little cut-off from the group. Sometimes we were able to meet by ourselves but we had to watch out for the old people. On one such occasion she said, "I love you, Steven." I nearly went wild. That was the most wonderful thing I had ever heard. I pulled her toward me and held her so tightly. Then she placed her head on my chest and I whispered the magic words, "I love you, too!" Oh, the warm feeling that filled my heart!

When I finally built my own little hut, with help from my father and some cousins, I had all the privacy I needed and no one, not my father or my mother or sisters, could come in without my permission. Sarah would visit me secretly, and we would open our hearts to each other without fear. Eventually, I got the courage to talk to her about "it". You know what I'm talking about; I don't have to explain it. My heart thumped like a drum. I got so hot that I stammered. She kept quiet and looked down as if she knew what I was about to say. I drew her into my arms and kissed her. She said something but I didn't hear. I was on fire...

I had expected that, as someone who had been initiated, I would be my own boss. But it turned out not to be so, because my parents kept ordering me about, telling me what to do, and asking me questions of where I was, and who I was with. My relationship with my parents seemed to take a turn for the worse. I would get into trouble just for staying out late in the night. Sometimes it would be because I would refuse to do what I had been told.

My father never liked disobedience. He would give me a resounding lecture, and then order me to my hut. He would shout that he wanted to see the light on and find me doing something worthwhile, like studying. He seemed to prefer to have me within the compound at nightfall. He would also nag me about how I dressed and how I trimmed my hair.

"I don't want to see you in that cap or with your head looking like a cock's," he would say. "These ruffian habits must never be seen in my house, otherwise you will have to look for your own house."

I never saw why he wanted me to dress his way. I mean, I'd look like a fool before my friends, and they would laugh at me.

One confrontation occurred after I visited my cousins in the city and saw how city teenagers dress up. I wanted to be like them because they looked smart. I had also watched a boxing match on the television where this world champion had trimmed his hair at the sides and left some hair on top of his head. He looked tough and mean, a no-nonsense fellow. I decided I wanted to be like him. That would make me feel strong, tough and manly for my size.

My parents just jumped to conclusions about me when I walked into the compound one evening with my new haircut. Just because I associated with some people they did not like, they concluded I was like them. They didn't trust me. Then they started comparing me with other people's children.

"Be like Tom, be like Peter. So and so's child studies well, why don't you?" From that day I decided to ignore them.

Being the short, five-foot-four inch person, that I was at that time, it was important that I create an impression of being strong and tough. Guys



would always make fun of me, and girls would treat me like their small brother. The girls were not interested in short guys. Even taxi touts considered me a kid. So acting and looking tough, standing up for my rights, and showing people that I wouldn't let them play around with me was how I lived. Sometimes I would get into fights at school to prove my point.

There was this time a senior student tried to force me to clean his muddy shoes. I told him I was not his servant and he got angry. He tried to hit me but I was faster. Before he knew it he was bleeding. Of course I got into trouble with the prefects, but I showed them how tough I could be for my height. But among my friends in the village I had gained respect.

One of the good things I got from my trip to the city was a pair of sunglasses, 'shades' as we call them. My cousin gave them to me along with a T-shirt with the picture a of music star. Whenever I wore them I felt like someone special. Guys said I looked like a film star or a musician, and you should have seen how girls would look at me.



That's how I gained people's attention. Girls, particularly, liked being around me, and they were free with me. Some guys envied me for it. I don't know if those are things to be proud of. I always desired to do things that made me popular and yet not different from other guys. I never liked sitting around and doing nothing. I never liked wasting time, but my friends liked hanging outside shops or bus-stops, and if I wanted to be part of them, I had to spend time with them.

I had this problem some time back, and I needed to talk to someone. That girl I have fallen in love with, Sarah, came to me and told me something I never knew whether to believe or not. She told me she was carrying my baby. I asked George, a friend of mine, what he thought I should do.

"Man you are in big trouble," George said. "How could you get yourself into this mess?"

"I didn't know this could happen. It's the girl who should be watching out isn't it? After all, she's the one who will become pregnant."

"When you get into this game you should know the rules," he added. "Do you know much about your body and a girl's body and how they function?"

“Only what we are taught in biology. But who cares about such things. When you’re with your girl it’s like being in heaven... Come on, George, you know how it is; there is no time to think about what will happen.”

“I don’t know about that ...”

“What do you mean you don’t know about this? Haven’t you done it before?”

George shook his head. I couldn’t believe it. “You’re not serious. You don’t have a girlfriend? I thought everyone does!”

“No. I don’t think it is necessary as yet. My dad told me about what happens in boy-girl relationships and how to handle them. He explained to me what girls are like and what boys are like; you know biology and more...”

“Your father talks to you about such things!?” I asked him.

“Yeah. We discuss these things,” he replied. “My dad believes in removing ignorance personally. He says he has to teach us these things so that we may say we were taught. He won’t allow us to be taught by the world as the Swahili proverb says: *Asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu* (*He who is not instructed by his mother will be instructed by the world*).”

“Aren’t you lucky! Me and my dad, we don’t talk. Somehow my father got to know of the relationship, and all he told me was that I shouldn’t break anyone’s daughter’s leg. He’s fond of riddles, and that’s how he put it.”

“Steven, if you don’t talk with your dad, why don’t you get an uncle or friend you are free with who can advise you on this problem?”

I went to one of my uncles and asked for his advice.

“So you think she’s lying to you,” he said.

“Maybe. I mean, how can I know she doesn’t have another boyfriend somewhere else? I have seen her talking to this fellow who was also trying to get her. Maybe he was able to seduce her. She believes anything she’s told.”

“Steven, you are behaving the way every boy in your situation behaves,” he said. “You put a girl in trouble then blame her for it. Now, if she were right what would you do?”

“You don’t trust me, uncle? You believe her don’t you? Look, I am not responsible for this and, anyway, girls should be careful. If they can’t tell you when they are not safe how...”

“Steven, behave like a man. Right now you are behaving like a little boy. Children are the ones who run away from problems. If you want to be treated like an adult, act like one, okay? Now you tell me what you would do if you were responsible.”

“I’ve never thought about it. I can’t marry her. My father wouldn’t hear of it.”

“But her father would,” my uncle interrupted. “But I want to know what you would do, not what you wouldn’t.”

I could not look at him. “Steven, when you do something you must be ready for the results and face them. Your father will eventually know about it. How will you deal with that? Would you wait for him to discover it first or would you rather tell him first? What about the girl’s parents? Take the bull by the horns.” He went on to explain how I should act and the things I should consider doing.



A CLOSER LOOK FOR YOUTH

WHY DO PARENTS BEHAVE AS THEY DO?

Steven: My relationship with my parents seemed to take a turn for the worse... Sometimes I would get into trouble for staying out late.

Rose: Her parents had invited her aunts to come and speak with her about what to expect and how to behave in secondary school.

Questions for discussions:

Sarah was surprised to hear that Rose discussed relationship issues with her aunts. Is it common in our society for girls to receive information on girl/boy relationships from their aunts? Who would you like to discuss relationship issues with?

Rose spent some time with her mother and aunts discussing issues that might affect her. What would you take out of this discussion? What would you add? Would you use the same approach? If not, what how would you approach the situation?

What were some of the pressures Rose 's parents placed upon her?

So, why do parents behave the way they do? How come they seem ignorant of what is happening to us, when they must have gone through the same experiences we are going through? Or was life so different then?

Well, being a parent is hard, especially nowadays. Think about the following points, for starters:

1. There is no school for parenting. Parents learn through mistakes — by trial and error. And guess what — we are the guinea pigs! Most try their best, but they just don't know better. Sometimes they even need our help in order to be better parents to us.

2. In the past, when our grandparents were young, uncles, aunts and grandparents had taught young people about becoming adults — the physical changes and all. In addition, there were initiation ceremonies, like circumcision, where boys and girls learned all about sexuality and responsibility from the village “consultants.” Parents did not have to talk to their children about such matters. Today, that traditional system has broken down and parents do not know where to begin.
3. It's hard for parents to talk to us about sex because they don't know what we will think. There are so many taboos and movies, novels and magazines, which present such wrong notions about sex. Parents are uncertain about our response to them if they bring up the subject.
4. We should remember that parents don't have all the answers. They may be afraid that we will ask questions they can not answer. The Bible has the answers, but then we don't always know what the Bible says about a particular subject, do we?
5. Sometimes parents make the same mistakes their parents made because that is the only thing they know. They were taught that way. Hopefully, we can help them seek more answers from the Bible.

We can help our parents become better parents to us. We could start with questions that do not necessarily have to embarrass them. After all, someone has to jump-start parents!

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY BODY?

Steven: I started noticing strange things happening to my body...

Rose: Sometimes when girls get to be our age they begin to change... Our breasts begin to show... we begin our monthly periods and pimples appear on our faces.

Questions for discussion:

What do initiation and puberty mean to Steven?

Steven began speaking in a deeper voice, and pimples are increasing on his face. What do you think is happening to him?

Where did Rose get education about her physical development? Was this the right source? If not, where would you prefer to receive information about your sexual development?

So, you have reached the stage of growing by leaps and bounds! Maybe you don't feel normal at all, and judging from other people's comments, you haven't been acting normal either. But this "abnormal" stage is indeed normal — in fact, you would be abnormal if you did not go through it.

A lot of these changes come as part of our preparation for adulthood (it happened to our parents, too). Adulthood has many wonderful but demanding responsibilities. Some of us will marry and become parents. Others, even though they marry, will not have any children. Others will remain single.

Each of us has a different calling to serve God. When we obediently go after that calling, it gives us great satisfaction.

Physical development brings with it urges that can easily get out of control. If we yield to these urges and try to satisfy them outside God's provision in marriage, we violate God's plan for us. The Bible says, "You were

bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.” (I Corinthians 6: 19-20)

The developments that are taking place in us are bringing us to our full potential as men and women, ready to fulfill God’s purpose in us.

You may not feel normal at all, but you are going through a normal process, for the responsibilities of adulthood. By the way, there are more changes taking place than you can see

HOW SHOULD I RELATE TO AUTHORITY?

Steven: I had expected that I would be my own boss. But my parents kept ordering me about, telling me what to do and asking me where I had been..

Rose: Sarah could not believe what Rose was saying. "You mean your aunts told you how to behave around guys in school? I would never let my aunts tell me stuff like that..."

Questions to discussion:

What does honouring parents mean? How does honouring parents as the Bible teaches help in developing character in Steven?

How might Steven have handled his parents' opinions about how he did things?

How does obeying orders, with or without clarification, help Steven develop positive character?

We all want to be free. We want to cut loose and be ourselves, do things our way and experience our individuality. But it seems there is always someone who has us on a leash, deciding how far we can go and tugging on the leash when we exceed the set limits. Sometime it's parents, at other times it's teachers or other people in authority.

We often fight against those who set rules and then try to justify our rebellion. Imagine a sheep in an enclosure. It can only go so far, then it has to turn back. Frustrating, eh? Now, remove the fence. The sheep can keep going and does not have to turn back. In the evening, it wants to get back home but can't figure out where home is. It's lost!

Like sheep, we would be lost if left to make our own decisions all the time. Limits are set to help us know whether we are in the right or in the wrong. Without them, how can we tell?

Parents, teachers and others in authority are like the shepherds, calling out to remind us that we have reached the limits and should turn back.

The moment we recognize that those in authority are there to help us, we realize that cooperation is the best strategy. It may even result in the leash being extended because we have learned well and earned respect.

Of course, those in authority do make mistakes. It is alright to point out such mistakes, but doing so rudely inevitably produces negative results. Remember, you owe respect to those in authority.

The cost of going against authority can be very high, and is usually not worth the trouble, so think before you leap.

Ultimately, everyone is answerable to God. His word, the Bible, is the final authority. We can not go wrong if we pattern our lives according to God's commands.

WHY AM I ATTRACTED TO THE OPPOSITE SEX?

Steven: Why do you think we are so attracted to girls nowadays...

Rose: Sarah, there is a guy in our drama club who I really feel attracted to although I really don't know why...

Questions for Discussion:

How does Steven handle his attraction to a girl?

How can Steven develop a beneficial and responsible relationship with Sarah?

Traditionally, how was one to relate to the other? What is the biblical guidance on how to develop boy-girl relationships?

Do you really think Rose was attracted to Mike? Why or why not?

Are you attracted to the opposite sex? Your answer is probably no, but we all know the truth, don't we? You are strongly drawn to members of the opposite sex.

We probably start off shy and mute, but once we find our tongues, things move pretty fast. We talk, smile at one another from a distance, smuggle notes to each other and begin to identify the other as a "special" friend.

It is wonderful that such things happen to us, because they are an indication that we are beginning to respond to God's design for friendship and eventually marriage, hopefully to the person of His choice.

For most of us though, it's a long way to the altar. In the meantime, we should be getting to know members of the opposite sex. It can be a lot of fun, especially if we choose our friends well.

But danger lurks close. Many young people have experimented with sex and hurt themselves very badly. Some have become, or made another, pregnant. Others have contracted a sexually transmitted disease or even AIDS. All of them have denied themselves the joy of discovery and fulfillment in marriage and cheapened themselves. Remember — mangoes are best when ripe. Likewise, sex had better wait until marriage.

Getting to know members of the opposite sex through group activity is a wonderful way to enjoy their company without exposing oneself to dangerous experimentation. Avoid clinging to one person and excluding yourselves from the rest.

Socialize, don't specialize.

HOW SHOULD I CHOOSE FRIENDS?

Steven: "My parents would not like that," Steven said. "I mean, being alone with a girl in a room."

"You're a man," Ken retorted. "A man's got to do what a man's got to do."

Rose: Rose spent time preparing to go with a heavy heart because she would be leaving her cousin behind. This was the one person with whom she could talk freely and enjoy spending time with.

Questions for discussion:

Do you think Rose was influenced by her friend Sarah? Why or why not?

How can teenagers be helped to deal with peer pressure from their friends?

Are there positive aspects of peer pressure? Did you note any in the story? If so, what were they?

Who were Rose's real friends in the story?

Explain Rose's relationship with her cousin Anne? With Sarah? With Mike?

What were some of the positive aspects of each relationship? What were some of the negative aspects?

Someone said, "You can tell a man who boozes by the company he chooses." Our friends are very important, not only because they are there for us, but also because they help to mold our character and attitudes. We may want to make friends with someone who is popular in the hope that we too will become popular. Or, someone may have something we want and the best way to get it would be to befriend them first.

It may be that we want someone we can control, so we look for a friend who will do what we want. Sometimes we think that if friends join us in

our rebellious schemes and do wrong things with us, it makes it easier, and we feel safer.

We may want friends for company, to take away our loneliness and boredom, and to keep our minds busy.

The problem with these reasons is that they are all selfish. If we make friends for selfish reasons, we use them until we don't need them anymore, then we discard them. That hurts!

Often we choose bad friends knowingly — maybe because they are available, or popular, or because other people expect us to choose those particular people. That is not very wise, is it?

When choosing friends, look for some with the following qualities:

1. someone with common interests — like hobbies;
2. someone with standards to live by — someone who is game for anything could influence you to do wrong things;
3. someone who dares to be different and will accept you when you choose to be different;
4. someone who is willing to share you with others — allow you to have other friends;
5. someone who will tell you when you are wrong! We often need that.

One of the best qualities in a friend is understanding. We like to be understood and accepted, just as we are. In that way, no friend beats Jesus. He will stick by us through thick and thin. What's more, it is through him that we can find the best friends.

HOW CAN I BE ACCEPTED BY OTHERS?

Steven: I decided I wanted to be like the boxing champ who trimmed his hair at the sides. That would make me look tough and manly for my size of five-foot-four inches.

Rose: I think he seems to be a nice guy and keeps looking at me during drama practice. Maybe he's just looking at the pimples on my face.

Questions for discussion:

In the story, Rose's aunt tells her that she should study and behave like Mama Michael's daughter. How do you think this may or may not have affected Rose? How would you have felt if you were in Rose's position? Why or why not?

Did you think that Rose valued herself?

Nobody likes to be made fun of. We all want others to think well of us and like us. Sometimes we try very hard to impress other people, but we get frustrated when they do not accept us.

Think about some of the things that bother us the most, for example, our looks. I'm too short, fat, dark, light, ugly. I don't like my nose, teeth, lips, legs, eyes. My voice is too high or low.

Most of these things have nothing to do with any choices we have made. They are not our responsibility in that we can not change them. If we base our worth on such things, we are sunk, because we are powerless to change or control them.

However, some of the most undesirable characters have very desirable physical features. There are proud and arrogant tall people, handsome drunkards and beautiful thieves.

There are things we can control. Habits and attitudes determine our character and determine our real worth. It may not be instantly obvious, but in the long run a boy or girl of good character will command more respect and admiration than one with good looks.

And doesn't the Bible tell us as much? "*Man looks on the outside but God looks on the inside.*" (1 Samuel 16:7) It is even said of Jesus that he had no beauty that should attract anyone to him (Isaiah 53:2) God cares more about our attitudes than he does about our appearance.

WHAT ARE THESE CHANGES IN MY BODY?

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psalm 139:14)

Sometimes as we are growing up, we are fearful; not in the sense of being afraid but in the sense of not understanding the changes God intended in each of us. Change is part of growing older and is normal in all that God has made. Have you observed the first tassel pop up from the maize plant? It is the sign that better things are coming and that soon the plant will be fully mature and produce a harvest of plump, full maize cobs.

Our bodies also give us signs of change. They are signs of maturing and of something more to come. You do not remember the most rapid body change. You tripled your body size and weight in the twelve months after you were born! Now, you are entering the second major period in your life of body change. You will not triple your body size (thankfully), but your body shape and size are changing significantly. Since you are now aware of everything around you, unlike the last time your body changed in infancy, you may be curious, uncertain, or even fearful. In addition, some of your friends may be changing and some may not. Perhaps you are wondering what is “normal! The fact is, you *all* are normal.

Let’s review some of the changes — things you can see, and things you can not see. All these changes are indeed some of the “wonderful works” that God knows “full well” according to the verse above.

Changes you can see

Perhaps you woke up one morning and noticed your skin was suddenly bumpy and oily, as if someone had rubbed a thick layer of Vaseline on your face during the night. When you washed, the oil washed off, but the bumps or pimples did not. In fact, over time, more appeared, while some

left. Your face may seem very different to you. If you are a boy, you notice some extra hair appearing, not on your scalp, but on your chin, neck, and upper lip. What should you do! First, understand that you are normal. The oily face with pimples may be annoying, but it is usually temporary, lasting only in these years of rapid change. It is best not to apply extra oil or Vaseline to your face during this time and to wash your face with warm water in the morning and evening.

Your body structure is changing. The way your clothes fit is usually the first sign you see. All at once, it seems that the school uniform your parents just purchased is too short! You are getting taller. Girls usually grow taller than boys at first, and then boys catch up and usually become taller than girls. If you are a girl you may feel embarrassed that you are now taller than some boys in your school class or even your older brothers. If you are a boy, you may feel that you have stopped growing all together and that girls will always be taller than you. It takes several years for you to reach the height God uniquely designed you to be. We all grow at different rates.

There are other changes on the outside of your body. In both girls and boys, hair begins to grow under the arms and around the genitalia, or your private body parts between your legs. This happens to every boy and girl during this time of development. It's another sign that you are growing up. In a boy, the shoulders and chest become broader and hair develops on his chest. He is taking on the shape of a man, not a boy. On the chest, hair develops on the chest and the nipples become more firm. This happens to every boy developing into a man. The penis, or private part used for passing urine, grows larger, along with the small sacs under the penis known as the testicles.

During sleep, sometimes the penis may become very hard and long and a white substance known as semen passes out of the hard penis. After this, the penis returns to the usual size. The boy wakes up to find the bed sheets wet. He may not understand what happened during sleep but this is a normal occurrence and beyond his control.

Other times, during waking hours, a boy may be attracted to a girl and begin to concentrate on how the girl appeals to him or looks to him. The

penis may become hard and long while those thoughts are in the boy's mind. This is called an erection. In actual fact, the muscle of the penis is not growing bigger. Rather, the penis is flooded with blood in the many vessels in the penis, making it very hard and erect. In a short time, the penis returns to a normal size.

A girl's chest also changes but in a more noticeable way to others. Her breasts develop. The breast tissue begins with just a small swelling and perhaps a little tenderness. The breasts continue developing, growing larger with more noticeable nipples. The size of breasts will differ from one girl to another. God is making each girl into a unique woman. In fact, in the same woman one breast can be slightly different in size from the other. When the breasts mature and become larger, girls will start to wear a bra to support their breasts.

Changes you cannot see

Inside your body, changes are happening to make you a man or woman. The growth spurt is inside just as much as outside!

The boy's voice is changing. You can hear some scratchy sounds at first, but it is the process of the voice box in the throat changing, and the voice becoming lower than in girls.

The boy is also developing sperm, a very unique and special cell that contains the "map" or blueprint of who you uniquely are: your skin colour, your shape, your size, and to a certain extent your ability to be gifted in particular areas of life. Millions and millions of these sperm are made in a man's body and stored in the testicles. God designed the man's body to release these sperm through a milky substance known as semen which may pass through the hard, erect penis.

In God's plan of marriage these physical changes move further. The mental attraction a husband has toward his wife is accompanied by a strong and normal physical attraction. A man desires to have his wife and a woman

desires to have her husband in a very close and intimate way. In our language, we refer to this intimate act as sex. Having sex means that a man places his erect penis into the woman's body through the vagina. The opening for the vagina is between the opening where the urine comes out (urethra) and the opening where the stool comes out (anus). The vaginal opening is completely separate. In a man, the firm penis is preparation for having sex with his wife.

God's design is that this sexual fulfillment occurs only in marriage where there is trust, love, and security for the married couple. The Bible speaks of this act very freely in the *Song of Songs* and affirms this act as very lovely and fulfilling in marriage. Sex, a very intimate union, joins a man and woman physically in a very special and enjoyable experience that God reserves for marriage. During this act, the man is highly excited and releases the semen containing the sperm. The sperm may then unite with another special cell, the egg or ovum, that it meets inside the woman's uterus. If this union of the sperm and ovum occur, the woman becomes pregnant and a child begins to grow.

Girls have many changes inside which also may be seen on the outside. Unlike boys, girls not only change during adolescence into women, but as women, their bodies experience changes every month. From birth, a girl has special organs designed to develop the ovum and shelter and nurture a tiny baby. As girls become women, these inactive organs spring into action. The ovaries which make the eggs, begin to develop and actually produce one tiny egg every month. This is known as ovulation. The egg travels through tubes to the uterus one time every month.

For one period of time every month the girl will bleed through the vaginal opening to the outside of the body. We often refer to this as her "period". The body is shedding the egg and the extra blood-rich lining of the uterus in a normal way. This bleeding does not mean you are sick. In fact, it means you are very normal! It will occur every month of a woman's life unless she is pregnant or older and no longer capable of having children. The bleeding usually occurs around the same time of the month, but the timing in the month is different in each girl. The length of time a girl bleeds during her period may vary slightly, but it is usually three to six days. For good hygiene, a girl should wash every day and wear cotton wool or cotton pads known as sanitary napkins, or strips of cloth inside her underwear

to collect the blood. The cotton or pads should be wrapped and discarded. If cloth is used, it should be washed and placed in the sun to dry. When a girl has her period she may feel different. Some girls, but not all, may have some cramping pain during the first day or so. Others may feel more emotional and more likely to cry or feel anxious. This is very normal and results from the changes inside your body which you can not see. These changes involve hormones, or body substances which control these changes each month.

If sex occurs between a man and woman or a physically mature boy and girl, the firm penis in the vagina releases sperm. The sperm travel through the uterus and into the tube joining the uterus and ovary. If, at this time, the ovary had released an egg into the tube, the sperm may enter the egg. This union of the man's sperm and the woman's egg is called fertilization; the beginning of a new life. It will take nine months after this occurrence for a baby to be born. Pregnancy only occurs when two things happen at the same time: when sperm is released into the woman's vagina in the act of sex at the time of the month when a woman ovulates. Ovulation refers to the time when the egg is released from the ovary. It is not easy to predict exactly when this may occur. Therefore, many acts of sex carry the possibility of pregnancy as the egg can survive in the uterus up to 48 hours after ovulation.

God made you in a very special way. He delights in your joy of growing up. He also gives you guidelines to enable you to face the challenges of growing up and the physical and emotional changes. These guidelines protect you, your friends, your family, your future and your society. God's guidelines are very clear.

Sex is reserved entirely for marriage to one partner for life. Only in that marriage union, before God and man, may you fully enjoy the pleasure of the gift of sexuality and perhaps the gift of children. Sex outside of marriage brings many problems because it is disobedience to God. One of the biggest problems is the lack of harmony in relationships including one's relationship to God. Other problems may be physical problems including a large variety of sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS. *"God wants you to be holy and pure, and to keep clear of all sexual sin so that each of you will marry in holiness and honour."* (I Thessalonians 4:3,4)



A CLOSER LOOK FOR PARENTS

ESTHER'S STORY

Esther is a wife and mother living in Nairobi. This is a true account of her experiences growing up and of her desire to help her own children.

I was born and brought up in the city, so my aunts and grandmothers were not around to give my sister and I guidance as we became women. I must thank the Lord for my parents who gave us the instruction and guidance in our lives.

One day, at the age of thirteen, I started experiencing strange abdominal pains. My mother was away, so I went to my father and asked him to take me to the doctor. When I explained my problem, he told me that I was experiencing bodily changes that were natural to all girls my age. He took time to reassure me and explained what I should do.

We had family sessions talking together about our education, life, relationships, and other things. Although we had our usual bouts of family friction, our home was a warm and welcoming place. We were able to talk freely to our parents, and to joke and play with them. So, it was easy to approach either of my parents on any matter. Even to this day, our parents are close to us. I value this relationship that was built upon strong family support and openness.

My parents were not able to give us a lot. We lived in a simple house and had few fancy clothes. But the love they gave to us was more than enough. Even our neighbours noticed and would comment on our relationship. Some of my friends would tell me that their homes would become destructive the moment their fathers walked in. For us it was just the opposite. It was a time of joy, shouting, and preparing tea or a meal

to take together. That was the key. We were *together* as a family. When I was younger, I remember my parents talking to my older sisters behind a closed door. Eventually, as I grew, I was invited to join their conversations. We discussed football, the country home, our forefathers, tales, boyfriends and girlfriends, school, status in the house, and physical changes that were leading us into maturity. In addition to these, we had family prayer times together every evening.

Being close to my Dad made me feel special. Whatever I told my Mom I could tell my Dad, and whatever I told my Dad, I could tell my Mom. In my mind I had to be straight in what I was planning to do. My friends would sometimes tell lies about what they were doing or where they were going. Even before becoming a Christian, I felt that I had to be responsible to them. They trusted me and allowed me to develop friendships with boys and girls. I would never spend time alone with boys or attend wild parties. Somehow it made me capable of deciding what was right for me. As a result of this trust, I learned to make decisions on my own.

Today, I am glad that my parents brought us up as they did. As a matter of fact, my husband's family admired and appreciated the way my parents brought up their daughters. Long before I married Francis, his mother told him, "Son, if you are to marry, please get one of *Japuonj*'s (the teacher's) daughters." My mother was the teacher. Our family's reputation was rooted in how our parents brought us up, rather than in what we owned or did.

I now have a husband and four children. My husband, Francis, and I want to bring up our children in a way that builds wholesome relationships with them, just as my parents did. Our nine year old daughter sometimes comes home from school with many questions about becoming a woman. She is already exposed to so much! I take time to answer her questions openly and to let her know that she is free to come to me with any question. We are becoming good friends.

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER

Think back to the story of Rose. Her world and relationships were changing rapidly. She started secondary school and for the first time was away from home. She began to interact with boys as well as other girls. What influence were they having on Rose? Remember her aunts who came just before she went off to school? What was their desire for her? Think of her mother. What counsel did she give? And where was her father? We are not told anything about him, apart from his job. How might he have helped her?

Rose made several critical decisions in her relationship with her friend, Mike. Those decisions could have made the difference between finishing school or failing to finish, having a baby as a very young mother or keeping herself sexually pure. Decisions made in a split second can mean the difference between health or sickness from a sexually transmitted disease or even death from AIDS. Wise decisions made by our teenagers, come from years of openness, counsel, guidance and love from parents.

Let's look closer at the family foundations necessary for our youth to make wise decisions. We may call them foundation stones. The stones we lay will always be part of our children, even when they build their own homes. As parents, we are the carvers of the stone, shaping them to fit together to build a strong structure in our home.

Foundation Stone # 1: Time

Our first stone is time. Parents are stone masons, carving a crude piece of rock into a lovely stone for a wall of a home. It requires a great deal of time and patience. We are busy people and so much demands our time. It is difficult these days to make a living, to support the educational needs of our children, and to care for aging or extended family members. Above all these, our children are most dear to us, and we make many sacrifices

for their well being. But too often, we fail to carve out one sacrifice they desperately need: time. Think back to your own home. When was the last time you spent time alone with your children, without the demands of your job, friends, or extended family pressures?

For some of us living in the cities, our children spend more time with a person employed in the home to help us, than they do with us. For those of us who live in the country side, the work we do to maintain our homes like fetching water, working on our farms, and going to market separate us from them. Sometimes we do not give our teenagers time because we are too busy with younger children.

When we give our children our time, they learn valuable lessons. First, when we guide them ourselves, they learn that we value them highly. They are special people to us. An employed person in the home, the school teacher, or even the youth leader cannot guide our children as we can. We must do it. We must give them individual time. We must give them regular time. We must give them periods of extended, uninterrupted time. We must give them varied activities in our time together — time to learn new things, time to have fun and laugh, time to talk, and even time just to be together, without any particular reason.

Think now, about the time you give your child. How much time a day? How regular? What do you do with the time together?

Consider how you can develop time together. Remember the Bible story of Martha and Mary? Martha was always busy, preparing things for Jesus. Mary was the one the Lord praised because she yearned to just be with Jesus and learn from Him. Give your teenager the same privilege. It may be more nourishing than the meal you are preparing for them tonight. Or perhaps you can combine some things. Give a nourishing meal, but sit down and enjoy it *together*, while you talk and learn about each other's day.

Foundation Stone # 2: Listening and talking

We began with time, because it is basic to all other stones we are building in our children's lives. But we may neglect to lay the foundation of listening to our children. Too often, we think that, as adults, we alone have the important things to say. But let's listen to some of the things our young people are saying. Remember Rose? In the story when her aunts came to talk to her, "Rose longed to say what was on her mind, but she was not given a chance. Besides, she knew that if she did talk, it would be perceived as talking back to her aunts or being disrespectful. So she just kept listening."

In Kenya, we gathered youth together and listened to them discuss their concerns. They told us they value the teaching of their parents and want to follow God's way, but they need adults to listen to them and to help guide them, not always preach to them. They told us they wanted to delay having sex until marriage, but they were confused by the patterns of unfaithfulness they saw in some of their parents' marriages. When we listened to them, we learned some things that are sometimes hard to hear.

How should we listen? We can listen with respect and love, even while discussing sensitive issues. But listening to one another and talking together does not just happen. It needs to be planned. Perhaps because mothers and daughters usually do more things together, it is easier to talk. It is necessary for fathers to create opportunity to spend time talking with their daughters. This is a critical foundation stone only a father can lay for the future marriage of his daughter. As her father, you are the first and most critical way your daughter will learn to interact with a man. It is the stone you lay for her to help her communicate in the future with her husband. Will she know how to share her feelings, how to give good counsel, how to listen, and help make wise decisions? This understanding begins at home, not with her mother, but with her father. In the same way, a mother prepares her son for marriage to a woman.

Foundation Stone # 3: Love

There are many ways we show love to our children. We often sacrifice to give them what we could not have as children. We provide for their needs and care for them when they are sick. We instruct them so they will live lives pleasing to the Lord and be respected in our communities. We show our children we love them by what we *do* for them.

But love is not only doing, it is also *being*. It is *being* an example of Christ's love to our spouse and to our children. "*Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*" (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

Think about your relationship with your son or daughter. Are you kind? Are you keeping a record of wrongs? Are you rejoicing in truth? Are you trusting, hoping and persevering with them and for them?

Rose's aunts told her that her parents always wanted her to be a nurse, so she should work hard in school and not disappoint them. In what ways do you think Rose's parents were showing her love by saying this? In what ways might they not have been showing love and support?

One of the strongest foundation stones you can lay in your children's lives is developed through the love expressed between you, their parents. "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*" (Ephesians 5:25) It is this same kind of sacrificial love Jesus spoke of before he left his disciples. It is a love that also unifies. "*I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*" (John 17:23) Jesus is saying that the love between believers, the same sacrificial love expressed by Christ to His church, is a love that will attract others. It is the way we learn about love. Your children will understand more of God's love as they see it expressed in your marriage.

Foundation Stone # 4: Developing gifts

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us... If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12:6)

There are two exciting truths here. First, God himself has given your daughter or son abilities to serve Him. They are called *gifts* because that is exactly what they are—gifts from God.

Second, these gifts are to be developed. God will use many experiences and many different avenues to develop these gifts in our children. He will use schools, books, teachers, friends and churches. But as parents, we have the first privilege and responsibility to unwrap the gifts in our children and help nurture their development and use. God begins with us, and he continues with us throughout our lives as parents.

Rose's parents were demanding she study nursing in school. Perhaps Rose's gift was not the gift of mercy or encouraging others — gifts often expressed in nurses. How can we, as parents, discover our children's gifts and encourage them to develop?

Developing gifts in ourselves or our children is a life long process. But we can begin by talking and listening to our youth, by exposing them to people and occupations to observe the use of different gifts, by encouraging and supporting them in school and by praying for God to open up his plan for them.



BUILDING UPON THE STRONG FOUNDATION

The Foolish Farmer

There was once a very foolish farmer. He did not like working in the hot sun and the rain in his field. So he decided to grow his maize in empty tins. He collected the tins, filled them with soil, and put them on a cart that would roll. Although he knew his crop would be small, it was not much work for him. His wife could water the maize with water from the kitchen. It was safe from diseases, weeds and goats. All he had to do was push the cart into the sun during the day and back into the house at night where the plants would be safe. At first, the farmer thought he was so much smarter than his neighbours.

The plants sprouted and grew quickly until they were several inches tall. Then the roots began to push against the sides of the tins but could not grow any more. One by one the plants died or just stopped growing. Some of the tins had rusty spots where the roots broke through. As the plants grew they slowly tore the tin apart. The farmer was disgusted because the tins were ruined. He told his wife to take the ruined tins out and bury them in the earth. She did. Some plants died because nobody tended them, but a few grew and were the only plants that bore any ears!

We might laugh at a farmer as foolish as this one, but sometimes parents try to raise their children in tins! When children are young they need strong rules that are firm and hard to help them to grow. They need their parents and family to protect them from things that might hurt them. The maize did well in the tins when it was young. But sometimes parents try to keep the same strong, restrictive rules when their children get older. Like the maize plants grown in tins, these young men and women will do one of two things:

1. Some will push against the rules and break them. The family will also begin to break apart in arguments and hard feelings. The children may

be rejected from the family for being disobedient and ungrateful. A few who are tossed aside will grow up into strong adults. Many, because they are rejected from the family, will fall prey to enemies like alcohol, careless sexual relationships and bad friends, who will harm them and keep them from being strong, and, perhaps, even kill them.

2. Some will obey all the rules but stop growing into adults because they never became rooted in the knowledge and responsibilities that would have helped them grow freely. They will see their maturity die away and for their whole lives will act more like children than adults.

But raising children into men and women is hard work for parents. Steven's parents did not know exactly what to do when he started to disobey rules that they had set for him. The Bible has some instruction on how to raise strong adults; instruction that helps parents know what to do.

Listen to what your child wants to tell you before you answer.

“He who answers before listening — that is his folly and shame.”
(Proverbs 18:13)

A group of community health workers were once discussing why they continued to work in spite of the fact that they received no money for their health work. One woman said that the respect that she received in being allowed to address the chief's *baraza* (public meeting called by the chief) was an honour to her and helped her to do her work well. A young man said the same thing. Giving honour to people in our cultures is very important. When we give honour to our children, we help them to grow into responsible adults.

Most children grow up to respect their parents, especially their fathers. Children are honoured when their parents listen to them, just as the community workers were honoured when they were allowed to address the *baraza*. Parents communicate to their children that they respect them and treat them like adults when they listen to what they say.

When parents treat their son or daughter like adults by listening to them, the children will often act with greater maturity. If the father refuses to listen to his son or daughter, his young adult will act like a little child.

Circumcision is one way that some tribes mark the change from a boy to a man. When parents begin to listen to their children, that too marks a change from being a child to being a young adult.

Parents do not have to agree with their children, and will sometimes not give them what they ask for. Children may be unhappy if they do not get what they want, but they will respect and listen to advice if they know their parents respect them. Parents also will begin to understand their growing children in greater depth. A father and mother who always answer their son or daughter before listening, will rear children who shame them. A father and mother who respect their son or daughter enough to listen to them before answering will often give the best answer, and will help their children grow in wisdom.

Do not become angry with your child.

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.”
(Proverbs 25:5; 30:33)

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” (James 1:19-20)

Steven said that his parents quarrelled with him over everything. It is clear that Steven is not yet mature — he does not have the understanding of a man. Do his parents have to fight with him, though? When Steven provokes his father so that his father loses control of his temper, the teaching is going in the wrong direction — the father is becoming more like a child rather than Steven becoming more like a man. When parents

respond in anger to the anger of their children, they can no longer build them into strong and wise men and women. Discipline does not require anger.

Do not worry so much about the little things — your child will outgrow them anyway.

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children (cause them to become frustrated with many little rules and regulations that they have to follow); instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)

When you walk down the streets of any town or city in Africa, you will see very few grown men with shaved heads or wearing odd looking clothing. Why? Is it because their parents beat them? No, probably not. Is it because they are all good men? No, certainly not. Children simply grow up and their tastes change.

Let's look at it a different way. If a lorry driver is making a long trip, which is most important: to make sure that he is making good progress along the road, or to fix every pothole along the way? If he tried to fix every pothole, he would be so tired and poor that he would probably never reach his destination. Lorry drivers try to steer around as many potholes as they can. When they see a pothole they cannot steer around, they drive through it carefully. When a pothole catches them by surprise, they hold tightly to the steering wheel, bounce through it, and stop on the other side to see what damage might have been done in order to fix it. Finally, if they see a pothole that is too dangerous, they may just stop until they can either drive around it or fill it in.

Steven's parents were trying to fix every pothole along Steven's road to manhood. Rather than helping Steven work toward becoming a strong, independent young man, they tried to correct every little problem along the way. In response, Steven lost his patience and increasingly became a problem. Instead of filling the potholes, avoiding them, or helping him

recognize which ones were so dangerous that he should not try and go through them, Steven and his parents were digging them deeper.

Fathers and mothers, by expecting their children to become adults before their time, find that they fall into many potholes of anger and resentment that they could avoid without doing their children any harm.

Focus your discipline and punishment on those things that speed your child on the road toward responsible Christian adulthood.

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves as a father the son he delights in.” (Proverbs 3:1-2, 11-12.)

Steven’s parents, though they loved him, may have ignored a very important resource that God had given them in disciplining him. As boys and girls grow from children to men and women, they have two goals. First, they wish to be increasingly independent of their parents. Secondly, they wish to be respected. These two goals are not bad, but are given by God to help us grow. Children, though, can pursue each of these goals in ways that are bad or good.

The desire for increasing independence may be expressed either as rebellion or as responsibility — usually a bit of each. As a child grows to adulthood, he or she wishes to be increasingly free from the authority and direction of his or her parents. Steven’s parents acted in ways that gave messages that conflicted with one another. After his initiation, he took on some of the characteristics of manhood, perhaps having his own room or hut or becoming more distant from his sisters and mother and their activities. This communicated to Steven that he was a man to be respected. On the other hand, his father tried to maintain control over many other decisions. This communicated to Steven that he was a child to be commanded. Steven, like young men and women anywhere, rebelled against parental authority that was inconsistent.

Fathers are particularly sensitive to rebellion from their sons. Steven's father, for instance, felt that Steven's choice of music, hair style, clothing, and interest in an occupation other than being a lawyer, was rebellion against his authority. But when he tried to make Steven obey him, Steven began to rebel even more. If the conflict grows too hot, Steven may begin to avoid his father and begin to hide his disobedience. How can Steven and his father work together to build responsibility rather than rebellion? How can parents help their children build responsibility rather than invite rebellion? Here are some principles to help us:

1. Parents need to know that growing up does not happen quickly. Even though Steven has been initiated he is still childish in some ways. There are still potholes in the road. If children and their parents can discuss the issues that divide them, instead of dividing over them, they can get through the potholes and stay on the road to adulthood.
2. Parents need to allow children to make some decisions for themselves, particularly those decisions that will not affect their growth in the long term. Parents may not like their children's hairstyle or clothing, but neither of these will make much of a difference in five years or so.
3. Parents need to talk through decisions with their children. The choice of a career, friends and relationships to the opposite sex are all areas that children and their parents need to discuss. As children get older, their parents will increasingly lose control of these areas of their children's lives. Youth and their parents must establish a relationship that allows them to talk over these areas rather than a relationship that makes young men and women hide things from their father and mother. As parents see that their youth are making good decisions, they will turn over more control to their sons and daughters.
4. Parents must also explain the responsibilities and rules that their children must continue to obey as long as they live as part of the family. Steven's father, for instance, should assign Steven some responsibilities to do for the family and require Steven to do them. Parents should not allow their sons and daughters to mock them or other adult relatives, to lie or steal, or to do things that can destroy their character in the long

run. Parents should make sure that their children know what their responsibilities are, perhaps even writing them down, why they are important, and what the penalty will be if they do not carry them out. If they disobey or fail to carry out their responsibilities, parents should carry out the punishment that they had warned their children about.

When parents and children have disagreements or even arguments, it is like hitting a pothole. If they have been hurt by one another, it is important that they take time afterwards to look at the damage, decide how best to repair their relationship and move forward again. As they discuss areas that might even be hot ones, they can learn from one another as they listen and better understand the problems each other face.

What fathers and mothers do in their relationship to their children will direct their desire for independence either into greater levels of responsibility that help them forward on the road to becoming wise men and women, or into increasing rebellion. They also want to be respected. What can parents do to help their youth become respected young men and women in the family, clan, and wider community?

Fathers are powerful people; their response to their sons and daughters will affect them for all their lives. Every child deeply longs for his father's approval and respect. When Paul, who was a respected elder, wrote to Timothy, a young man who had become like his son, he urged Timothy to be a workman that God would approve and who did not need to be ashamed. He recognized the power of shame and respect. You perhaps have seen men and women, even older, who never received respect from their fathers but were shamed by them instead. These men and women are often among the most bitter, angry, and lonely people in the world.

How do fathers and mothers show respect for their children?

- They listen to what they say.
- They talk to their sons and daughters about important things and take time to teach them.

- They speak well of their children without comparing them to one another, to other members of the family and to others in the community.
- They reward their children when they are responsible and, when they are not responsible, they allow them to suffer the consequences of their irresponsibility.
- They permit their sons and daughters to develop skills in areas where they are strong.
- Fathers invite their sons to come with them when they are with other men; mothers invite their daughters to be with them when they are with other women.

What happens when parents show respect toward their youth?

- Their youth grow in respect for themselves and others in authority.
- They try to live up to the expectations of their fathers and mothers.
- They honour their parents, caring for them as they grow older and respecting what they say.
- Their sons and daughters obey them more, not out of fear of punishment, but because they want to please them.
- Their sons and daughters become good parents to their own children.
- Their children bring them honour from others in the clan and community.

How do parents shame their children?

- They criticize and shame them publicly, especially in front of their friends or other adults.
- They ignore them.

- They only speak to them to tell them what to do, or in anger when they fail.
- They think that their youth have no wisdom nor knowledge.
- They never show them their approval but only criticize them.
- They do not reward them for responsible behaviour, only punish them for acting irresponsibly.
- They always tell them that they should be like one of their brothers, sisters or other young men and women in the community.
- They isolate their sons from the company of other men, and daughters from other women.

What happens when parents shame their children?

- Their sons and daughters avoid them out of fear and anger.
- They mock their parents before other youth.
- Their youth grow bitter and angry.
- Their youth disobey them and lie to them.
- Their youth grow up to be like their parents and, in turn, shame their own sons and daughters.
- They bring their parents great shame in the community.

Fathers and mothers are powerful. They choose whether to use their power to build their sons and daughters up and bring them life, or to tear them down and bring them shame.

Use punishment only when your child acts like a fool.

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence. Do not rebuke a mocker

or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.”
(Proverbs 22:15, 15:5, 9:8)

The first response of many fathers to disobedience on the part of their sons is to punish them. How do parents know when they should punish their youth? The Bible tells us: If your children listen to your instruction and rebuke and respond to it, they are becoming wise and you do not need to punish them frequently. If your son and daughter never listen to you and regularly mock your advice, you need to punish them.

It is best to use punishment more while your sons and daughters are still little children. Children who learn that bad actions bring hurtful responses will begin to learn wisdom, and by the time they become teens, they will be listening and wisely responding to advice rather than fearful of punishment.

When parents punish their children too harshly, their children will obey them out of fear. But the children will also begin to hide from their parents. The fear ends when the son or daughter are out of their parent's authority, either at boarding school or as they get older. When they no longer fear their parents, they will neither love them nor obey them.

The Bible, however, tells of a different way. When the Apostle John was encouraging Christians to obey God, their Father, and follow His paths, he wrote, *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The man who fears is not made perfect in love.”* (I John 4:18)

Parents must punish their sons and daughters when they are very young and unable to listen to advice. As children become older, parents can still control their children's behaviour through fear of punishment — but only until they become independent and strong enough not to fear their parents. Without correction or discipline young men and women will never be the complete young men and women that God wants them to be.

As fathers and mothers watch their sons and daughters grow, they can see them grow in wisdom. As children grow in wisdom, their parents should

not use fear of punishment as a way to direct them. Instead, as their sons and daughters learn to listen to the advice, rebuke, and warnings of their parents, given in love, they will decide to behave the way that they should, not out of fear but out of love. These children become wise men and women who are perfect or complete in love and maturity.

All parents want their sons and daughters to grow up into independent, responsible, wise men and women. Rearing children is like growing plants. A farmer may throw seed on the ground and walk away and leave it. Some of it will sprout and grow but the plants will be stunted and bear little yield for the family. The seeds from these poorly tended plants will often grow plants that are no better. If the farmer wants a good yield, he and his entire family must work very hard in the fields.

Rearing a child into a responsible, godly man or woman also requires work. Feeding a child, providing shelter and education are not enough. Children also need the direction, attention, respect, and love of their fathers and mothers.

“To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool. A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.” (Proverbs 17:21,25)

“The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice.” (Proverbs 23:24-25)

HELPING YOUR SON DEAL WITH SEXUAL ATTRACTION

At the end of our story, Steven was facing a big problem. He had shamed his family. He had fathered a child with a young girl he would not marry; and he had shamed himself. All of the people who were most important to him were upset with him and his behaviour. How did he get into this mess? Whose fault was it? Could his parents have done anything to help prevent this from happening?

Steven found himself in this situation because he had not learned to control his sexual attraction. As a young man he was responsible for the decisions he had made, but he was not alone in bearing the consequences. His parents, family and clan all shared his shame and the expense of trying to make things right. Sarah and her family shared the responsibility of the child; and Steven's child would pay the price of never belonging to the family in the same way as legitimate children. And, yes, Steven's parents could have helped prevent this from happening if they had discussed sexual information with Steven.

How can you help your son control his sexual attraction? Here are some suggestions.



Control your own sexual desires and behaviour.

If you are moving with other women, using pornography, or admiring others for their sexual promiscuity, you will not keep it a secret from your son. He will find out from a relative, another man, or one of his friends.

Shortly after King David murdered Uriah in order to possess his wife Bathsheba, David's son Amnon fell in love with his half-sister, Tamar. Amnon, along with the other sons and daughters of David certainly knew of David's sin. Hot with 'love', Amnon later raped Tamar in his tent. David did nothing. Perhaps Amnon even defied David saying, "You are worse than I, for I killed nobody." David's son Absalom, the full brother of Tamar, killed Amnon his brother in vengeance; and later led a rebellion against David. If you are tearing apart your own family relationships by your sexual behaviour, you cannot teach your son how to control his.

Help him recognise that his sexual attraction is good, not bad.

Sexual attraction is God's gift to us. Steven's father might have saved Steven from shame had he explained not only how his body was changing but also helped him understand God's role in his sexual attraction. He intends our sexuality to be one of our greatest treasures, bringing us great pleasure and enabling us to bear and rear children. For Steven, to have felt attracted to Sarah is not a bad or shameful thing. It is good. Even to be tempted sexually is not bad; Jesus was also tempted. We sin only when we fail to control our desire.

Dealing with sexual desire is like running down a steep hill. A young man found himself at the top of a steep hill. He knew that it was dangerous to try and run down the hill but he was encouraged by his friends to try. Once he started to run, he found that he could not stop because he was going too fast. Finally, unable to control his run, he fell. The result? A broken leg! Steven needed to know that the best time to prevent breaking a leg is not after he has started running down the hill. The hot desire of sexual attraction can too easily take over. Even if he wants to stop, both he and his girl friend find that their desire, once it flames up, is too strong a force.

Steven needs to know that there are many things that would pull him down the hill to a broken leg. Pornography, his talk with friends that measures manhood in the number of girls they have had sex with, and especially, being alone with a girl in his hut, all pull him toward a sexual relationship.

God made us so that our desires pull us toward the intimacy and excitement of sexual intercourse. Steven can best control these desires by deciding not to run down the steep hill. Once he and his girl friend start running toward the bottom, they will discover that it is very hard to stop.

Because our sexual drive is one of God's most valuable gifts, it needs to be guarded. A new husband and his family would be very angry with the bride's family if they began to distribute the bride wealth among all of the wedding guests. The bride wealth belongs to the bride's family. In the same way, God expects young men to control their sexual activity until they can give it to their wives as bride wealth that is not to be shared with others.

Help him find ways to enjoy the company of girls without sexual activity.

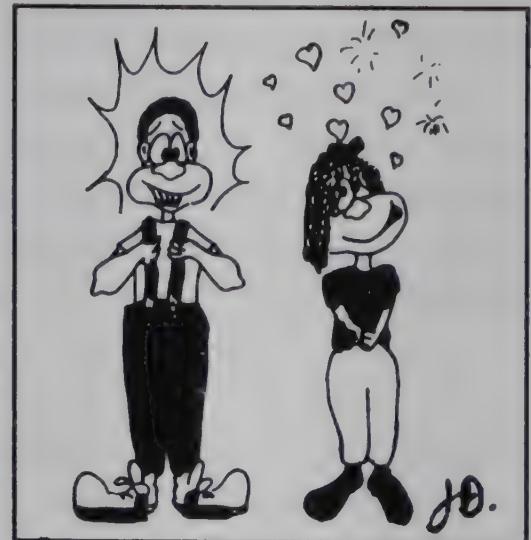
Steven's parents grew up at a different time than Steven. Steven's father probably had more pressure from his clans and communities to behave responsibly toward girls. Steven's father was probably married at an earlier age than Steven will marry. Steven's father certainly did not watch, listen to, or read as many things that are designed to raise sexual desire as Steven.

Steven's father, then, gave Steven very little advice that was helpful and may actually have caused Steven to hide his relationship with Sarah. It is dangerous to hide a boy-girl relationship in a boy's private hut! If Steven had been able to talk to his parents with Sarah, it would have been much better. They could have helped Steven and Sarah think about their relationship. They could have helped them see the problems that could come from sexual relationships without being committed to one another in marriage. Problems like shame, parentless babies, personal and emotional hurt, perhaps even sickness and death. Even better, Steven's parents could have encouraged Steven to participate in group activities with other boys and girls where they could have a good time, but also be under the supervision of an adult.

Finally, a man's sexual drive is a valuable but dangerously powerful gift. Parents cannot protect their children from its strength. Fathers can, however, help their sons understand their attraction to girls, welcome it as a gift from God, but also learn to control its power.

HELPING YOUR DAUGHTER RELATE TO THE OPPOSITE SEX

Your daughter is a blossoming rose, growing taller, fuller, and more beautiful. Are you celebrating that development of the Master's hand or does it signal to you that perhaps around the corner, the next week or day, she may become sexually active? Some of the choices your daughter will make depend on you. We do not mean a decision to circumcise her or not to circumcise in order to control "loose behaviour", we are talking of building character that is honourable and pure, so that our daughter's decisions, made outside our reach, will honour her, you, her friends, and more importantly, the Lord. Let's look at some principles to guide us.



Principle # 1: Your daughter is becoming a lovely rose. Celebrate her physical development and help her look good and feel good about her appearance.

"I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalm 139:14)

Sometimes, we are afraid to compliment our girls or notice the beauty developing in every young woman. We think it may encourage wrong desires. But just the opposite is true. If a young woman feels the physical and emotional changes within her are somehow wrong, this perception of herself will cloud every relationship. If she feels the growing attraction to a boy is basically evil, she may seek to push those feelings away and try to "prove" that it is not so. She may feel guilty without developing a natural and acceptable way of relating to boys. The best way to encourage a wrong idea of relating to the opposite sex is to list all the things wrong with young women and men and constantly warn young girls to "behave themselves".

Remember Rose's aunts? They warned Rose about becoming pregnant before they ever showed their acceptance of her development and her delight in her growing loveliness. Instead of beginning with warnings, help your daughter look her very best and feel pleasant about the way God has made her. Begin positively and discuss with your daughter what it means to become a woman because of physical changes within her that are of God's making. When she appreciates herself, she will begin a wonderful process. She will later appreciate giving the feeling of confidence and self worth and the sense of beauty within her, to her husband, along with her physical body.

Principle # 2: Create opportunities for your daughter to interact in wholesome ways with the opposite sex.

“The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’...live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature...the acts of a sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality...but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:14,16,19,22)

Your daughter is commanded to love her neighbour and that includes members of the opposite sex! She is also commanded to have self control and to live a moral life through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is your desire, that your daughter love others with God's love, keeping her motivations pure. How can you help this happen?

You have heard it said, “I'll send my daughter to a girls' school so she won't get in trouble.” The problem is, by isolating her from healthy interaction with boys, she may never have the privilege of knowing a boy as a friend or as a brother in Christ. Then, she will have little basis in the future for knowing a husband as a friend. Men and women, boys and girls, differ in many ways, including our way of thinking or addressing issues and in our roles and our understanding of life. These differences are

designed by God to compliment one another, not to overpower, control, or manipulate one another. These are differences to be celebrated, not condemned. These are differences to understand, not run away from. These are challenges to enjoy, not feel guilty about. These are opportunities to nurture a foundation for future friendships, not to bury because they may be misused.

Remember Esther's story? She talked to her parents about her boyfriends, long before one particular friendship blossomed into engagement. Esther felt comfortable being with boys, because her parents accepted healthy boundaries for her and encouraged her to mingle in groups. Good places for healthy and necessary interaction with young men are: church youth groups, youth camps, youth ministry projects, school, or family functions with other families. The fences you need to help your daughter keep include avoiding being alone with a boy, dressing in a way that sexually attracts men, and hiding her relationships from you.

Principle # 3: In addition to instructing your daughter about how to care for a household and how to cook and raise children, show her how to relate to a husband with honour, openness, discussion, and compassion.

“For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Ephesians 5:31-33)

“That’s the way my mother did it!” we often hear said. Daughters create homes and relationships similar to their mother’s. What kind of relationship will that be? What can you do now to develop that relationship?

Let your daughter observe and learn from the positive, respectful interaction you have with your husband. Talk over selected issues with your husband in front of your daughter so she may see how you handle things together. Show your daughter that is it just as important for you to spend

time with your husband, talking, learning, and growing together, as it is to cook and clean for him.

Principle # 4: Pray for your daughter and all her relationships with young women and young men.

“...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13)

We are limited. As weak vessels we do not have perfect marriages, perfect responses to problems, or perfect answers for our children.

But God knows no limit. He is the designer of your daughter’s life, and he is able to open her life to the beauty he is putting there and to the desire to follow and obey Him. He is able to help her stand when temptation comes and to keep herself pure for the man of God’s choice. He is able to help her make wise choices. It is a joy to train our children, to discuss with them and be an example for them. But our greatest privilege, as mothers and fathers, is to pray.

BUILDING UP YOUR TEEN-AGE CHILD'S SELF IMAGE

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator." (Col. 3: 9-10)

Steven visited the city on his last school holiday, and saw how his cousins who were city teenagers lived and dressed. He also watched the television and saw many new exciting things, including a championship boxing match. When he returned home, he could not stop talking about how much he wanted to be like those people. They projected images of smartness, wealth, power, strength and independence. He wanted to wear fancy clothes and trim his hair like the boxer's to compensate for his shortness that made him look younger than he was and treated like a child. His self-worth was low.

Self-worth is the image a person has of himself or herself. It is how one feels about oneself and who one believes he is. Traditionally, much of the African self-image was rooted in the family, clan and tribe. "Generally, we believe we are who we are because of who we are descended from, to whom we relate and where we live." Our culture and its traditions determined our sense of identity. It was quite easy to fit in and to grow up.

The village was the world. Because of this, parents of post independence times assume that their children's experiences will be similar to their experiences and that they will share their values and goals. Steven's parents thought the same.

But growing up is very different for today's children, the ones Steven and Ruth represent. Almost everything is changing. In school they are taught many subjects and different ways of doing things. They learn about other cultures, about various faiths, about diversity and differences. Through books, newspapers, magazines, radio and television, they are presented

with various lifestyle choices. They interact daily with children from different villages, tribes and sometimes countries; children who are sometimes very different from themselves. The whole world has become their village.

When the village is our world, our identity and sense of belonging is easy and straight-forward. We are a people who think the same, act the same and live in the same way. But when the world becomes our village, our identity and sense of belonging depends on individual choices; the family, clan and tribe (even race) have less control over us as individuals. As long as Steven interacted only with his village mates, he was able to keep a uniform, socially accepted lifestyle. He was able to follow his cultural traditions. Once he visited the city and was exposed to different cultural traditions his world expanded. His choices increased and were more self-centered than social-centered. He picked up on things that would help him win the approval of his friends, things that would make him unique and give him a reason to be proud of himself.

Adolescence, the path to becoming an adult, takes a young person like Steven through tremendous emotional, physical and mental changes. These changes occur at the same time, hardly giving the youth time to understand and appreciate each one of them. Steven, for instance, is beginning to have thoughts and feelings of a man toward a woman while his body, though preparing itself for adulthood, is not yet fully developed. He thinks of the ideal man as someone who is strong, tough and muscular; a picture that is different from what he is.

These changes will shape the way a young person feels about himself and how much he values himself. Most young people measure their self-worth by ideals passed on to them by society: family, friends, pastors, teachers, and companions. These ideals include beauty, intelligence, strength, wealth, physique (body build), careers, jobs and excellence in sports. But the ideals parents value, vary greatly from what their teenage children value. Many times these differences cause misunderstandings between parents and children.

Several things enable one to develop self-worth. These include the need for belonging, the need for acceptance and the need for feeling adequate. Steven desires to feel he belongs to his age-mates. To do this he tries to make sure that he spends time with them, even if this means spending longer evenings with them. But his father does not appreciate his lateness. Steven wants to be accepted by his peers so he trims his hair according to the accepted hairstyle of his time. He does not want to be laughed at. But his father insists on a different style. Steven wants to feel adequate and important to the group, so he develops his story-telling skills and after his visit to the city, returns with sunglasses that make him the centre of attention.

Steven's desire to belong is a desire that everyone has for an identity. We all want to be identified with a particular group, otherwise we are displaced strangers in a world full of people. This identity is the first step to our self-worth and self-image. We make a name for ourselves first by identifying with the larger group before we can develop enough strength to stand on our own. As an adolescent, Steven finds his identity in his small group of age-mates.

But his father fails to understand that he needs this group to help him mature into an adult. These are the people he will interact with as a businessman, a leader, and a citizen. He needs to learn how to socialize with them. His father may need to help him realise that although the large group may give him a sense of identity and security, he has to learn to make individual decisions even in the large group. As he trims his hair in the latest style, Steven is looking for the key to being accepted in the group. He might identify himself with it, but he cannot be a player in the group until he looks like them and shares in the group's ideals. Once the group welcomes him he will have moved a step further to valuing himself. If the group rejects him, he will ask himself how different he is from them and if he is normal. This happens to all of us. We fear being different from others lest it turns out that we are abnormal. That hurts our self-image and worth. Steven's father might try to understand this and cultivate in his son those things that will have a long-lasting impact in making him accept himself, rather than try to mold him into what he thinks Steven should be. To feel adequate Steven does things that will bring attention his

way. He has to compensate for his loss of height by trying to act tough, look attractive to the girls, and let his voice be heard through story-telling. We all try to let others know that we are in the room, one way or the other. If we happen to be overlooked we are disappointed and hurt. Some of us withdraw into ourselves and keep away from big groups, others take things like alcohol or wear dresses that will give us confidence to speak out and be heard. Steven's father might help him feel adequate and a valuable member of the community by allowing him some freedom to make his own decisions, and involving him in some of the family issues. He may also discuss with him some of the reasons why he wants things done one way rather than give instructions that must be followed without question. In this way, he will develop self-confidence in Steven.

God's affirmation of our self-worth

A study in the Biblical teaching of how God values each individual would be of great importance to Steven. Steven needs to know that as human beings, we are made by God in God's image to be like God.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Gen. 1:26) Steven should know that each one of us was formed by God and is known to him as an individual: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Ps. 139:13-16)

Understanding this will help Steven appreciate his uniqueness as God-given and ordered. He need not try to please other people or struggle to make his presence felt. There is one person who values him. A God-centered viewpoint changes the whole picture. Our purpose is not our own, but God's. We identify ourselves with someone greater than ourselves, our communities and our world. While we are responsible for using and developing what God has given us, God is responsible for the outcome. We need to exchange our values and ideals with God's. God's values are these: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* (Gal. 5: 22-23)



FRIENDSHIP

THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIPS (THE MIRROR OF OUR FRIENDS)

Think about three true stories with me — removed by centuries and cultures but still very real when we think of friendship.

Story One:

Jonadab was Amnon's cousin, and very best friend. Amnon, King David's son, lusted for his half-sister Tamar who must have been very beautiful. Tamar knew nothing about it and, if she spoke with Amnon at all, treated him only as a brother — to have sex before marriage and within the King's own household would be such a wicked act that it would shame them forever. Amnon knew this too and looked sad and worn out every morning as he woke up having thought of Tamar in his bed throughout the night.

Jonadab saw that the prince was sad each morning and asked what was wrong. Amnon told him.

"Look man, is that all?" replied Jonadab. "Hey, aren't you the King's son and not just a nephew like me? Here's what to do. Pretend to be sick in bed. When King David comes to see how you are, ask him to send Tamar to cook for you. Once you've got her in your house, it's all over. You're a sexy guy. I'm sure you can get her into bed with you."

Amnon thought about it and even began to picture how it would all work out as he seduced Tamar. The first part of the plan went well. He pretended to be sick; King David came to see him; he asked for

Tamar; she came and actually kneaded the bread dough in his room rocking her body back and forth as he watched her. He got hotter and hotter and, after the bread was baked, he ordered all the servants from the room and asked Tamar into his bedroom alone. That's where things went wrong. Tamar did not want to come to bed with him. She protested and finally he grabbed her and raped her. Disgusted with himself afterwards, he hated her and ordered her out of his room.

What happened to Jonadab? Two years later, after Tamar's brother, Absalom, revenged Tamar by murdering Amnon in the countryside, reports reached King David that Absalom had killed all of his sons and not just Amnon. He tore off his clothes and laid down on the ground in mourning. Who should come by but his nephew Jonadab.

"Your majesty, don't be so upset. Absalom only killed Amnon, not all the others, and we know what Amnon is like! See, here come the rest of your sons. They're all OK." (See 2 Samuel 13).

Story Two:

Mary, who lived in America, was a beautiful woman, the mother of two young children. Her husband, Joe, had a good job as the manager of a restaurant, but it took too much of his time and Mary felt that he just didn't love her as he used to. Mary's friend, Joan, came over to her house one morning and they were talking together.

"Look, Mary, you're beautiful and men are attracted to you — haven't you seen how they look at you? But you're not getting any younger and you won't have your looks forever. Get rid of this guy, Joe, now while you still can attract men. Things aren't working — he doesn't look at you any more, the way other men do. You don't even enjoy being with him any more, do you? Divorce him now; don't wait until it's too late."

Mary listened to Joan and divorced Joe even though Joe didn't want to give Mary up. Some years later, Mary, still unmarried after a string of lovers, recognised that her friend's advice had been wrong. But it was too late; Joe had married somebody else. The damage had been done.

Why did Amnon and Mary listen to the bad advice of their friends?

Their friends told them what would excite their desire, but there is a deeper reason. Their friends were mirrors for them. Jonadab told Amnon about his power and prestige as the King's son. Joan told Mary about her attractiveness to men. They said to Amnon and Mary, "You are powerful and attractive people. Take what you deserve." Amnon and Mary thought to themselves, "You know, my friend's right. I am the King's son/I am desirable to men. I can have what I want."

Why do youth give so much attention to the advice and feelings of their friends — good or bad?

Youth are unsure of themselves — they do not yet know what they are like. They are always looking in the mirror of their friends to see what they are like, and they believe what their friends reflect back to them. Their friends, have great power in shaping their behaviour. Youth growing up in Africa, who are caught in the gap between foreign and traditional cultures, have many more mirrors to look into than their parents did. When Steven chose to dress like a popular hero, he looked into the mirror of his friends and they reflected back, "Hey, you're really one of us. You look wonderful." What did the mirror of his parents reflect to him? "Son, I'm disappointed and angry with you. This is disgraceful and a shame to our family. You're not really one of us unless you get some decent clothes." Two different mirrors — two different messages. Which will he believe? Which does he want to believe?

What can parents do?

So what can I do as a parent? It looks to me as if we will lose our children. No! Most parents are still more powerful in their children's lives than their friends. Your sons and daughters look into the mirror of your eyes and wait to see what you reflect. If you only reflect their problems and shortcomings back to them, they'll soon stop looking into your eyes and start looking in the eyes of anyone who will reflect something positive back to them. As a father, I have seen my own children and their responses to me. When I reflect back to them that they are capable, smart, kind, caring, responsible and even physically attractive, they visibly lighten in their expressions and work harder to become the person they see reflected in my eyes. They are better able to recognise when their friends reflect wrong messages to them.

Practically, what does this mean? Should I never correct my son or daughter? No, but when you correct, focus upon their behaviour and not their character. If you say, "You did the wrong thing and need to change. I know that you can change. Here's why it's wrong," you will find that they will begin to change. You have reflected back to them: "You are a capable person who can choose what is right."

Also, praise them when they deserve praise. You will need to be with them enough so that you know them well enough that your praise is real. The praise that I give to each of my sons and daughters is different because they are different.

Story Three:

Florence was a Christian and her husband was not, even though he truly loved her and was a good man to her. They had three children. One day Florence, who was faithful to her husband, discovered that she had a disease that could only have come if her husband had been moving with other women. In tears, she went to her friend. Her friend mirrored Florence's pain and betrayal but also mirrored the

grace that she could call upon as a Christian — grace that could extend forgiveness to her husband even though he had wronged her.

Florence confronted her husband who responded with real sorrow and fear of losing her and the children. The process of forgiving him has taken years, and Florence has often turned to her friend for help. Her friend communicates, “Yes, it hurts and it is hard but you draw upon a powerful source of grace and forgiveness because Jesus is a part of you.” Without this reflection of Florence’s ability to extend grace in the eyes of her friend, the story might have turned out differently.

Parents, mirror to your children what you want them to be.

THE LADDERS OF FRIENDSHIP

Mrs. Zebedee, the mother of James and John, was a woman who wanted the best for her sons. James and John, whose future once seemed to extend no further than the sea of Galilee, had become good friends and followers of the next King of Israel. They were part of the "in group." Did not Jesus invite them along to important events when his other friends and disciples had to stay behind? Sure there was Peter, too, but she knew his family. Peter was too unpredictable and his family was not educated and just too traditional — certainly James and John would be the ones to sit on the right and left of Jesus when he took his place as King. She asked Jesus to grant her this request. He said he would not make that decision, but the other disciples became angry with the two sons of Zebedee. What right did they have to ask for favours? The competition that the disciples felt — even though they were friends — came to the surface.

Competition as a part of friendship is nothing new. Both boys and girls know who is on the top and who is on the bottom of the ladder of friendship. At the top, you find the heroes and heroines — those adults or youth who define for the others what it means to be successful and respected. At the bottom you find the young, the poor, the weak, and the ugly.

Youth want to be part of the group at the top. They do not want to be excluded; they want to be friends of those who are higher up and further than themselves. To be at the bottom — at the fringes — is to be a nobody. What are they and we willing to pay to be "somebody?" Plenty.

Heroes and Heroines

Youth often identify a hero or heroine and begin to pattern their behaviour and attitudes after that person. "If I can just act like him; if I can just act like her; then I will be like her," they say. Advertising professionals know

this well. "If I can just wear these athletic shoes, I will be like the athlete who wears them. If I can move with as many girls or boys as the sexual athlete, I will be like him or her — powerful and desired by all," they think.

Who is your son's hero? Who is your daughter's heroine? Who do they wish to pattern themselves after? As parents we are often surprised to find that we define heroism for our children by our own choices?

Who is your hero or heroine and why? Is it because of their money, or power, or prestige, or skill? Is it because of their character? Which men and women do you admire in front of your children? If you admire the rich, powerful, and talented, your children will admire the rich, powerful, and talented. But their rich, powerful, and talented person might be a music star and not the respectable businessperson whom you admire. As you pattern your values and decisions around the successful businessman, your sons and daughters will pattern their values, decisions, dress, and words around their music star.

Are you someone your children wish to be like? You are the most powerful person in the life of your son and daughter. In our research, we discovered that youth in Africa really wanted to build a relationship with their parents that allowed them to discuss even topics of sexuality and their own behaviour. Do you model for your children the kind of relationship you hope they will have with their husbands and wives? Are you a hero or heroine to your young person? They want you to be a person they respect.

Youth will pay a high cost to belong to a group of people they admire.

Researchers in America wanted to know how important it was for people to feel like they were one with the group of people around them. They made up a simple test. They made a card with two lines on it.

Line A: _____

Line B: _____

They had several people in a room together who were strangers. They asked the people, one by one, which line was longer. But, before they came into the room, they had talked with all of the group except one person and told them to say that "Line A" was longer. Each person said, "Oh, Line A is the longest one," until they came, at last, to the person who was being tested. What would he or she say? What would you say? Most people went along with the group and said Line A was longer even though it's obvious that Line B is longer than Line A.

Why did these people say a short line was longer than a long line? They wanted to belong to the group even though they had not even met the other members until that day. They did not want to be different.

Young people are like the people in the experiment. They are afraid of being different from their friends because they might be rejected. If their friends are moving with other people, they will want to do it too, even if they know it is wrong. A girl may have sex with a boy not because she really wants to but because she is afraid that her boyfriend will reject her if they do not have sex. If boys are around a group of young men who brag about their sexual behaviour, the boys will also try and seduce a young woman simply to convince the other young men of his power. He will compete with them.

Following the advice of his friend, Ahithophel, when Absalom drove his father David from the throne of Israel, he put his tent on the roof of the palace in Jerusalem. One by one, in the sight of all the people, he took his father's concubines into the tent and had sex with them. Was it because he could not control his sexual desire? No! He did it to show everyone that he had now taken the power of his father, and he did it to show his followers that he was one with them and his ties to his father David had been cut off forever.

Absalom wanted to belong to the group of reckless young men who surrounded him. He also entered into competition with his father and wished to show all the people of Jerusalem his power. In the end he paid a very high price — he was killed because of his rebellion.

Youth will also pay the price of good behaviour to belong to a group.

How can friends help a young person to wait to have sex until he or she is married? Let's go back to the experiment.

The scientists wanted to see what would happen if only one of the group chose the line that was really the longest. They told everyone to say that Line A was the shortest except for one person who they told to choose Line B. What happened when they came to the person participating in the experiment? He or she usually chose the right line — Line B. Having only one other person choose correctly gave them the courage to choose correctly as well.

As a parent, you cannot choose all of the friends for your son or daughter, particularly if they are at boarding school. You can, however, pray for and promote their friendship with at least one other person of their own age who will live out good values. Just as importantly, you can be that friend, talking to them about the hard facts of life and helping them learn how to say “no” when they are under pressure to do what is wrong.

Imagine that one of your neighbours brought you over to his car and said, “Look, the front wheel has fallen off the axle. You are a good friend, I've picked you up in this car before but it is broken. You should help me put the front wheel on again.” For most of us, the question would not be if we *should* help but rather if we *have the skills* to help. Most of us would not have the needed skills and tools to connect the wheel to the axle again.

Most young people who have been in church know what they should and should not do about sexual behaviour. They do not know *how to say “no.”* They may find themselves “trapped” in situations in which they do

not know what to do. By reviewing the stories in this book and asking questions like, "What would you do now?" or "How did this happen?" and discussing them together, you can help your son or daughter gain skills that they may need to remain sexually pure and protect themselves.

THE FRIEND WHO IS CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

A friend loves at all times..... (Proverbs 17:17a)

What kind of a friend should we be toward our youth? What kind of friend do we want for them?

My daughter was talking about another girl who was companion but not a friend. "She is just weird. When I am with my other friends and we are laughing, singing, and just acting silly but having a good time, she looks at us as though she is saying, 'I'm certainly glad that I've outgrown such childish silliness'."

What was she really saying? She was saying that her true friends were those who loved and accepted her at all times and not only when they "approved" of her behaviour. She does not fear rejection from her true friends. The friend who is closer than a brother is the friend who continues to accept and love you in spite of your behaviour.

"The kisses of an enemy may be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend." (Proverbs 27:6)

A true friend is one who will correct us even while continuing to love and accept us. We may make a mistake as parents or as friends of confusing discipline or correction with rejection. A friend will sometimes wound the one he or she loves. Look at the friends of your son or daughter. Is there among them at least one who is willing in love to tell him or her things that might hurt for the moment? Are you able to confront your son or daughter while still communicating that you love and respect them?

As parents, we exercise some control over the friendships of our sons and daughters. We can advise and counsel them and even encourage friendships. Our ability to exercise direct control over the friendships of our children is ultimately limited — our children become increasingly independent and we are no longer around them.

A parent's greatest influence is in making the transition from authority to friendship not by controlling their sons' or daughters' friendships but by being a friend.

CONFRONTING COMMON CONCERNS

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES AND AIDS

Many of our youth are abstaining from sex before marriage and will not face the consequences of illness related to sex. We hope this guide helps keep youth from becoming sexually active before marriage and to marry someone who has also avoided sex before marriage. We know, however, that many youth are already sexually active and are facing problems related to having sex outside marriage. Among those consequences is the risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease or STD.

There are many different STDs, with different characteristics and problems, both long term and short term. Some STDs are difficult to detect for a long time, but in time they cause serious damage. Some STDs may be obvious with pus coming from the penis or vagina. The pus smells bad and may cause burning and extreme itching or discomfort. Some persons with STDs develop open sores on the penis, outside the vagina or inside the vagina. This condition is extremely dangerous for it allows the most serious STD, AIDS, to penetrate very easily.

Anyone with any of these symptoms must seek medical attention quickly. Without proper medical treatment that includes a very specific schedule of medications that must be taken without fail, the problem will recur in a more serious form. Also, the disease continues to be passed from one sexual partner to another. If not treated, eventually long term problems may occur like not being able to have children or even developing some types of cancer.

All STDs may be avoided by following God's plan for waiting to have sex until marriage and then being sure you are marrying a person who has not had sex before marriage. If one person has been sexually active, they

should be tested for the virus, HIV, that causes AIDS. Other STDs can also be checked for and treated before marriage. Some, such as AIDS and some other viruses that cause genital warts, are not possible to cure

The most dangerous sexually transmitted disease is AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). AIDS is caused by a virus known as HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). The virus may be passed from one sexual partner to another if one is infected with the virus. The problem is that most people do not know if they are infected or not, yet they may be passing the virus on to others for years. It is extremely risky to have sex outside marriage because the HIV virus is very common among teens and adults and can easily be passed through sex. Once a person is infected with the virus, they are infected for life. Eventually they will get the group of sickness associated with AIDS, and they will likely die.

It is probable that many of our youth will get AIDS. This is because as many as one half are sexually active and are often exposed to the virus. If they get the virus that causes AIDS, they will die in their youth. This is very tragic, especially when we know the sure way to avoid AIDS. The best way is God's way—not having sex before marriage and sticking to one faithful partner who has not had sex before marriage when you do get married.

SEXUAL ABUSE

We have all heard of “Sugar Daddies” and “Sugar Mommies”. They are persons who very selfishly and wrongly entice young people to have sex with them outside of marriage. Sometimes it is through promises of money, school fees, food and nice things. Very often young people are not aware of the consequences of giving in to these wrong and selfish demands for sex. This is a form of sexual abuse which is far from God’s beautiful plan for sex in marriage.

There are many forms of sexual abuse. Some are very easy to identify as abuse because they are forceful or violent such as rape. Rape is when a man or woman physically forces another to have sex against their will. But there are other forms of less obvious sexual abuse. This abuse may involve inappropriate touching such as hugging, touching private parts of the body such as the breasts, hips, or pubic area. It may be dirty jokes or demeaning sexual references made to men or women. Boys or girls may be victims of this type of abuse for many years with no other persons ever knowing. It is not only strangers who inflict abuse on youth. Often these behaviours are forced upon young girls by their male relatives or friends of relatives. When a man has been drinking, it is even more likely such abuse will occur.

Sexual abuse is a big problem to the one abused. Very often the person abused feels confused, guilty, or “dirty” and for many reasons may never tell a friend or parent. They may feel the person abusing them has control over their lives and they can say or do nothing about it. But the impact of the abuse just grows with time. There often is very serious emotional damage and an inability to respond normally to healthy relationships. There are struggles with fear, guilt, and self-esteem.

Our youth need to be informed about sexual abuse from an early age. Young girls can say “no” to any sexual advances from men or boys. But they must first learn to recognize what behaviour from the opposite sex is proper and what is not. Young men and women must also know of safe people with whom they can discuss any advances made to them. A parent is the best person, but it may also be a youth director or teacher.

Some churches have seminars for girls and also for boys in which they are taught how to handle these situations. Using role plays or stories are good ways to help children be aware of the wrong use of sex.

PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

Youth in Africa, even youth attending church, are sexually active. Research conducted among Kenya's youth attending churches throughout the country showed that 49 percent were sexually active. Even worse, among boys, 30 percent reported at least five different sexual partners.¹ You probably know of a teenage girl who became pregnant, but did you know how common it is? Every day an additional 390 teenagers give birth in Kenya.²

What does this mean? It means that girls are facing the many consequences of pregnancy including: often dropping out of school, facing a very difficult and dangerous delivery of the baby, and becoming a single parent as a young girl herself. It also means that there is an irresponsible boy who made the girl pregnant. He may not be faced with the same consequences, but before God he is wrong and will either live with guilt eating away at him or confess it and receive the forgiveness of the Lord, and hopefully, the girl and the affected family. It should mean that confession and forgiveness also bring opportunity to help the girl, the family, and the child, through careful examination of all the issues and contribution to support. It should never mean walking away from the problem and failing to be responsible.

Unwanted pregnancies frequently lead to abortion in Africa. For example, among the documented pregnancies of girls in school, nearly 40 percent ended in abortion.³ Abortion is extremely dangerous for the mother and brings death to the infant. Deciding to have an abortion is the wrong decision for dealing with pregnancy. Girls who are pregnant need help. They need love, support, counseling, and hope for the future. The best places for a pregnant girl to turn for these are the family, the extended family and the church.

DEPRESSION

“Even in laughter the heart may ache...” (Proverbs 14:13)

This proverb shows us that the outward emotion in any of us may not represent our hearts. Some of our youth have pain in their minds and hearts, and it may be difficult for them to express it to others. As parents, we need to understand what our youth are telling us, even if it is not expressed in words.

First, consider that our youth today are under a great amount of stress. Their world is rapidly changing. They are caught between two worlds; the world of their parents or grandparents representing a traditional cultural understanding and practice and the world of cultural change and confusion. Because jobs are scarce and competition for jobs is great, the pressure for young people to do well in school is very great. Instead of pressing to perform the best they are capable of in school, they must compete against classmates for position and eventually places in the universities and work place. The school syllabus is demanding, leaving little time for recreation, reflection, and restoration. In many homes, the family is also changing. Often one parent is away or extremely busy and the support that once was there is infrequent.

We should not be surprised that our youth go through periods of depression. It may come during exam time, during a transition period into a new school or home transfer, after a difficult encounter with friends or because of the lack of friends. How can we recognize the signs of an “aching heart” even when there is laughter? And how can we help prevent this from happening in the first place?

Some signs of beginning depression

Withdrawal is an important sign to recognize. Sometimes a young person experiencing depression will begin to stay alone more often, removing themselves from family conversation, activities, or responsibilities. It is often accompanied by lack of communication — just

the minimum is said. It is critical during this time to help your child by bringing to their attention that you are noticing this withdrawal and want to help them. It is important not to use punishment or ridicule, but patient interaction, with lots of affirmation of your love and your confidence in them.

Changes in eating habits may be another symptom of an aching heart. People who are depressed may begin to eat more food, more often, or may do just the opposite and eat less food, less often.

Inability to concentrate on studies or particular responsibilities. This sign may be especially disturbing to all concerned for it may affect grades in school. When this happens, the time one spends in studying is not productive.

Mood swings that are expressed in feelings of failure or inadequacy, and a sense of hopelessness. It may be accompanied by crying, expressions of anger, or simply silence and withdrawal. One day these feelings may strike with vigor, another day your young person may seem like themselves.

What can a parent do?

First recognize that stress is very real in our youth, and stress needs a healthy outlet. Youth need to talk about their problems and concerns with parents, their friends, and perhaps other trusted adults. Make time for that to happen. Seek to understand their feelings. Allow them to express themselves.

God's Word is an ointment of healing to the heavy heart. There are many passages we can turn to with our children. Passages like, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). We have included additional references below.

Our greatest privilege is to pray for our children. The Lord is able to bring comfort and guidance to confusion and feelings of inadequacy. Pray

specifically for your children, that the Lord would enrich their lives with his Word, that God would bring healthy relationships into their lives and that the goals the Lord has for them would be fulfilled.

Keep watch. There may be a need at some point to seek further help through a counselor, pastor or youth director, relative, or a physician. Be ready to provide that resource for your child before the condition worsens.

There are ways to help prevent depression. This discussion has been presented to help you understand depression and to build a foundation for dealing with depression. Developing a lasting relationship with our children is the best way—relationships of openness and caring, acceptance and guidance. Provide time during school breaks to relax with freedom from pressure. Encourage healthy friendships and create an environment where that can happen. Study God's word together and pray for one another openly. These activities will help carry your teen through tough times.

Additional Scripture

Psalm 40:1-3; Psalm 34:17,19; John 14:1-3; Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 26:3,4; Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 12:22-28; Romans 8:31-39.

DRUG ABUSE

Alcohol consumption is on the rise, especially in boarding schools. Parts of Africa are the global highway for illegal drug traffic. Our youth are at risk of involvement, for by nature teens are risk takers and adventure seekers. Sometimes, feelings of depression or hopelessness lead youth to take drugs to bury their problems. Drug abuse is a growing threat to our African youth.

So far, the primary abuse of drugs are smoking tobacco or *bhang* (marijuana), sniffing glue or petrol and chewing the twig known as *miraa*. Apart from tobacco, these drugs may produce feelings of lightheadedness or euphoria. *Miraa* excites and acts as a “high” that keeps you awake, but not necessarily alert. They alter coordination and the ability to concentrate. The responses are short acting but become addictive so that more and more are required. Some have disastrous long term effects, such as possible infertility with marijuana and cancer with tobacco.

The use of cocaine and injected heroin are extremely dangerous and highly addictive. These drugs are making more and more entrance into our societies and it is important to warn our youth against their use in any form.

We can help our youth avoid drug abuse. We must instruct them about the presence of drugs in the streets or schools and help them know how to respond when approached by those wanting them to experiment with drugs. Most importantly, we must help them have healthy outlets when they are anxious or depressed. We need to come around our young people and provide protection through open dialog, teaching, and environments that provide healthy outlets for our youth.

ENDNOTES

¹MAP International, 1995. *AIDS Prevention and Kenya's Churched Youth: Assessment of knowledge, attitudes, and practices.*

²National Council for Population and Development, Central Bureau of Statistics, Office of the President and Ministry of Planning and National Development, 1994. *Kenya Demographic Health Survey 1993.* Calverton, MD: Macro.

³Okumu, M and Chege I, 1994. *Female Adolescent Health and Sexuality in Kenyan Secondary Schools: A Survey Report.* The African Medical and Research Foundation, Nairobi.

FACTS ABOUT AIDS

What is AIDS?

AIDS stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*. AIDS is caused by a virus known as *Human Immunodeficiency Virus* (HIV). This virus weakens the body's defense system and prevents the body from fighting against infection. Eventually, people with AIDS die.

Method of infection.

The HIV is passed from person to person through sexual contact where body fluids, particularly semen, are exchanged (In Kenya 90 percent of all HIV infection is transmitted this way); through mixing of infected blood with clean blood (through blood transfusion); from an infected pregnant mother to infant at the time of birth; and through sharing of syringes (injections) with persons who are infected. This usually occurs with drug addicts who share syringes they use to inject drugs into their blood system.

HIV *can not* be transmitted through mosquito bites, through sharing cups and spoons and clothes with someone with HIV/AIDS, or through touching someone with HIV/AIDS by greeting, hugging, or kissing him or her.

How do I know if I have AIDS?

An AIDS test is conducted to see whether the body has developed antibodies against HIV. If the test reveals the presence of these antibodies, it means one has HIV. But the person does not have AIDS.

It takes up to six months for the body to develop antibodies and even up to ten years before someone develops full-blown AIDS. Within this time

one can unknowingly pass on HIV to other people through sex, from infected mother to child, or through direct blood contact.

It is important to counsel a person before letting him or her take an AIDS test.

What do people with HIV/AIDS need?

People with AIDS need to be accepted by family, clan, church and community. They need love and support. They need to discuss issues that will affect their present and future. They need good nutrition and physical care to help them be comfortable and live longer. They need the hope that God gives in times of despair.

The only sure way to avoid AIDS is God's way: Faithfulness within marriage and no sex outside marriage.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

PRINTED MATERIALS

Scripture Union Africa has a project known as Aid for AIDS. Through this project it has produced very useful guides for training youth on life-skills and relationships for an AIDS-free generation. Two manuals are available:

Adventure Unlimited, for 10 - 14 year old youth.

Choose Freedom, for 15 - 25 year old youth.

All the Right Moves, for 12-15 year old youth (South Africa edition).

Contact:

SU - Kenya, P. O. Box 40717, Nairobi;

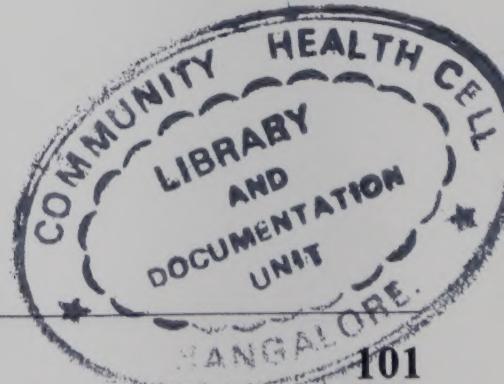
SU - Zimbabwe, 45 Heyman Road, Suburbs, Bulawayo;

SU - South Africa, P. O. Box 291, Rondebosch 7700.

Campus Crusade for Christ is developing a curriculum on abstinence entitled, *Why Wait*, with a biblical perspective.

Contact:

Campus Crusade for Christ, P. O. Box 55405, Nairobi, Kenya.



MAP International

Founded in 1954 as Medical Assistance Programme, MAP International is a Christian global health organisation providing services and materials (including donated medicines and supplies and emergency medical relief for disaster victims) to churches and missions in various parts of the world. MAP International is also involved in partnership initiatives with churches in many areas of holistic health and healing ministries, specifically in the areas of education and training, materials production and capacity building.

Located in Nairobi, Kenya, MAP International - East and Southern Africa regional office was established in 1985, and focuses primarily in the areas of health development, HIV/AIDS and reconciliation.

- How do we discuss adolescence and sexuality with our young people?
- When should we discuss this things?
- What is the right place?
- What words do we use?
- What are the issues young people are facing?
- How can we help our young people develop attitudes and practices which are right and safe?

This guide, drawing on research done in Kenya, and intended for use within families, youth groups, churches and schools, provides value-based Christian guidance on these topics in a clear, thought-provoking and interactive format.